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The University of Southern Mississippi

WIT IN THE EARLY MODERN

LITERARY MARKETPLACE

by

Danny Paul Childers

Abstract of a Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate School
of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
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ABSTRACT
WIT IN THE EARLY MODERN
LITERARY MARKETPLACE

by Danny Paul Childers

August 2014

The concept of wit undergoes a transformation in the sixteenth century from having associations with the intellect, with its cultural productions, and with classical study towards more direct associations with the writing trade and with clever wordplay. This transition, as I will demonstrate, relates specifically to tensions between humanist culture and the early modern literary marketplace. This dissertation begins by examining the early sixteenth century humanists' concept of wit and goes on to examine the presentation of the concept by four late sixteenth century writers—John Lyly (1553-1606), Thomas Nashe (1567-1601), Robert Greene (1560-1592), and William Shakespeare (1564-1616). I argue that each of these writers find themselves squarely at the crossroads of humanistic influence and marketplace demand and that their individual presentations of wit demonstrate the way each of them negotiates this territory.

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CHAPTER I

TWO CONNOTATIONS OF WIT

Introduction

Many of the concepts valued by intellectuals and academics seem to have little to no direct economic value for the general public. Questions such as "What value is this?" and "When will I ever use this in real life?" establish a familiar, almost universal refrain in classrooms throughout the United States. Conversely, intellectuals and academics frequently lament the lack of funding or lowered financial investments in the humanities and the arts. The tensions between the perceived cultural value of ideas by intellectuals and the immediate economic value of these ideas in the larger society define one of the central conflicts in modern intellectual life—especially for those attempting to make a living in fields directly related to the humanities.

When it comes to discussions about the value and function of literature, the conflict can be traced back to the complex relationship between the values promoted by sixteenth-century humanists and the values perpetuated by the early literary marketplace and how each informed arguments about the nature and function of literature.¹ I am using the phrase "literary marketplace" to denote the system of exchanges by which literary texts were bought and sold throughout England. In the early modern period these exchanges largely consisted of bookstalls managed by publishers or print houses such as those located in St. Paul's Churchyard in London, the most popular and the frequently referenced location for the buying and selling of books. However, I am also using the

¹ While this study focuses primarily on prose fiction and poetry, many of the arguments I make could be applied to a much broader definition of *literature*. In fact, I would argue that the type of debates in the early modern period I am exploring are important not just to these categories, but to the formation of our entire conception of the nature and function of the humanities as a whole.

term as a metonym for the consumer demand and literary tastes that emerge out of this system similar to the way critics such as Arthur Marotti, Alexandra Halasz, and David J. Baker have frequently employed it.²

In the early modern period, the concept of wit lies at the center of a conflict between humanist thought and marketplace values. Wit, for the early humanists, was a metonym for the intellect, its productions, and their social and cultural value. But the humanist concept of wit was itself disputed in the English literary marketplace of the late sixteenth century, where the term wit often came to be used as a marketing device associated with clever wordplay, sometimes even wordplay devoid of any real meaning. Charges of the abuse of wit became common and often involved both implicit and explicit arguments attacking individuals who were perceived to be writing texts for their own monetary benefit rather than for the improvement of the commonwealth. From this secondary usage we perhaps derive the term's use as a tepid compliment. Referring to something as witty often carries a connotation akin to calling a barking puppy *cute*. Today the term often functions to distinguish mental playfulness from serious intellectual contemplation. In short, wit's bark is often bigger than its bite. The more weighty connotations of wit have all but disappeared from modern parlance, but the underlying tensions between humanist values and marketplace values have not.

This study grows out of my desire to track the origins and developments of the humanist concept of literary value in the early modern period. It was this desire that first led me to examine the evolution of the concept of wit since the early humanist used the term wit to describe an individual capacity for classical study. Similarly, the term wits

² For more on the particular conditions of the literary marketplace and its growth in early modern England see Baker 1-34.

was often used to describe intellectuals as a social group during this same period. Later the term came to define particular groups such as the university wits of the 1580s and 1590s and later the court wits of the late seventeenth century. But as I studied sixteenth-century writers' conception of wit, I gradually became aware of tensions that formed out of the term's usage. In particular, I was compelled to investigate the tensions behind these claims in fuller detail by Thomas Nashe's fictionalized complaints in *Pierce Penniless*, wherein the protagonist argues that he was unable to make a living writing while those of far less wit and those who abused wit were able to thrive. I believe an examination of this topic helps lead to a better understanding of not just the relationship between early humanist culture and the early literary marketplace, but also the relationship between humanism and capitalism in general. The tensions and the collusions between these two forces are still very much with us today and very much worth examining.

The term wit undergoes significant transformation in the period in a way that betrays the tension between these forces. In attempting to identify the origins of a shifting point in the connotation of wit, Samuel Johnson observes, "It was about the time of Cowley [1616-1687], that wit, which had been, till then, used for intellection, in contradistinction to will, took the meaning, whatever it be, which it now bears" (28). It is highly significant that Johnson, a writer who is considered by many to be a master of wit, found himself in a state of aporia in attempting to characterize what the term had come to mean in his own time. This ambiguity speaks to the complex social matrix that had come to shape the concept of wit in the life and work of the professional writer by the seventeenth century. As I will argue in this dissertation, Johnson is correct about the

term's gradual shift in meaning, but his statement locates the final resting place of an evolution that began about a century earlier. As we shall see, disputes over the the humanist concept of wit emerged in the second half of the sixteenth century, well before Cowley set pen to paper.

The *OED* dates the primary use of the word wit to denote a quality or character of the intellect to the sixth century and tracks its etymology to the Old English *gewit*, which is defined as "knowledge" or "understanding." Variations in meaning along these lines include the use of the term to signify the embodiment of consciousness, the possession of intellectual capabilities, and various faculties of the mind, including imagination or cognition. The usage of the term to indicate the possession of reason ("out of one's wits" or "witless") or of the five senses ("five wits") are examples of the latter.

However, Klára Bicanová observes that by 1590 wit had gained a much more specific usage, one "associated with the ability to write plays and gain a living by the pen" (8). She reminds us that in the late sixteenth century, the term wit, more often than not was regarded as a valuable tool in the trade of the professional writer and moreover that it was often associated with a particular literary aesthetic. The earliest use of witty recorded in the *OED* to indicate specifically the process of writing or saying something considered eloquent or brilliant is in Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors* where Antipholus declares, "I know a wench of excellent discourse, / Pretty and witty; wild, and yet, too, gentle" (3.1.744-745).³ Adam Zucker offers a comparable description of this secondary

³ As will become clear over the course of the many examples that predate Shakespeare's usage in *Comedy of Errors* in this dissertation, this usage of *wit* is clearly not the earliest of its type. It is simply the earliest which the *OED* documents. The earliest text employing this usage in titular reference from the *Early English Books Online* database, for example, is Richard Taverner's *The Garden of Wisdom* (1505) which describes itself as a compendium of "proper wytty and quycke sayenges of princes, philosophers, and dyuers other sortes of men" (A1r).

usage of wit. He points out how the transactional nature of language means that, while the term had a strong association with the trade of the professional writer, its usage had ramifications that extended beyond the field of literature. According to Zucker's definition, to display wit in sixteenth-century England meant "to resituate knowledge so as to make it socially useful" (5). He explains that this understanding of wit had profound implications for the stratification of society:

As the population of London doubled twice over between 1500 and 1700, as its markets spread out and commercial exchange became a widespread way of life, as stockings and plays and ballads and satires and ruffs and pins and chinaware and all kinds of goods began to pass from hand to hand, the social logic of wit began to cut across expressions of political rank, gender relations, and economic status with increasing intensity. It could make masters out of disenfranchised servants and asses out of the King's knights. It could make terrifying social arbiters out of tasteful women and render wealthy men the abject slaves of fashion. Today, these transformations may seem like safe, even predictable outcomes of consumer society. This was not the case in early modern England. (11)

Zucker is describing specifically the way *theatrical* displays of wit often served to undermine the traditional roles and rules of social hierarchy. Borrowing the tropes of Terentian and Plautine comedy, a Renaissance play might, for example, feature a witty servant who gets the better of a foolish master. Such a play would seem to employ the concept of wit to champion the lower class servant's intellectual manipulation of his social betters. But, as Zucker hints, this destabilization of the traditional power dynamic

was all the more potent because it was part and parcel of the economic shifts occurring in sixteenth-century England, shifts whereby the predefined social roles were becoming destabilized by marketplace forces. Theatrical displays of wit not only indicated these social changes but facilitated the values of a consumer society and therefore the erosion of the feudal structure. These displays of wit entailed skillful (mimetic) disruptions of social roles and resulted in economic rewards for writers of witty prose.

Zucker's argument helps partially to explain the backlash against wit that begins in the last few decades of the sixteenth century and continues into the seventeenth century and beyond. Individuals who met with marketplace success were often charged with abusing wit and were frequently accused of being social climbers engaged in crass commercialism. Cowley's "Ode to Wit," for example, opens with the following claim:

London that vents false Ware so much store,

In no Ware deceives us more.

.....

Hence 'tis a Wit that greatest word of Fame

Grows such a common name. (9-18)

In these lines, Cowley implies that the "false wares" produced by those who abuse wit compromise the (nostalgically rendered) social position of true "Wits." Those of genuine intellectual stature, he seems to imply, had more social cachet before an oversaturation of wit in print led to depreciation of intellectual esteem by the general public. This claim may not hold up to historical scrutiny, but Cowley was far from the first to make it, nor was he the last. Wycherley attacks the sixteenth-century writers whom he refers to collectively as the "University Wits" along similar lines and even more overtly. He

begins his poem "To a University-Wit, or Poet" by openly accusing this group of using poetry solely for the purpose of material gain:

Your use of your Poetic Feet forbear,
 That your Feet real Socks might have to wear
 Which have none now, but what Poetic are:
 That something like a Shirt, you might have, you
 A Surplice wou'd design to put on too. (15-19)

Wycherley's argument that this group compromised the integrity of their poetic feet for the sake of their real ones is perhaps the ultimate realization of a long line of early-modern arguments about the abuse of wit. Here the idea of literary merit and the economic realities of textual production are rendered as starkly antagonistic, and Wycherly, seemingly without irony, displays little sympathy for the latter. A slightly earlier example of this sort of cynical characterization of wit is found in John Fletcher's play *Wit Without Money* (1614). In it Valentine, a self-proclaimed wit, unabashedly states that his goal is to use his wit as a means to parasitically leech off of the rest of society. Near the play's opening he unabashedly proclaims, "my wit's my Plot, the Town's my stock, Tavern's my standing-house, and all the world knows there's no want; all gentlemen that love Society, love me; all Purses that wit and pleasure opens, are my Tenant" (7). How and why did the concept of wit emerge from its original association with intellection to become so intensely associated with commercialism? The major goal of this study is to begin to answer this question that has profound implications not just for literary culture but for intellectual culture as a whole.

Because of its relationship to intellectual culture in the sixteenth century, the nascent period of both humanist and capitalistic marketplace cultures, the term wit is useful for exploring long standing questions such as: "What is an intellectual?" "What is intellectual culture?" and "What are its foundations and origins in a given society?" These are important questions because for many in academic life, how we answer them guides our perception of what should be valued in academic culture. In saying this, I do not mean to conflate the words *academic* and *intellectual*: the one does not necessarily imply the other. But even these terms and the ways they are used by intellectual historians can lead us fairly rapidly back to the early-modern period. For example, in his attempt to define an intellectual in his seminal book *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, Richard Hofstadter makes the following distinction between the professional and the intellectual:

. . . few of us believe that a member of the profession, even a learned profession, is necessarily an intellectual in any discriminating or demanding sense of the word. . . . We know, for instance, that all academic men are not intellectuals; we often lament this fact. . . . the professional man lives off ideas, not for them. . . . He is a mental worker, a technician. . . . The skills are highly developed but we do not think of him as being an intellectual if certain qualities are missing from his work—disinterested intelligence, generalizing power, free speculation, fresh observation, creative novelty, radical criticism. (26-27)

For Hofstadter, academicians who qualify as intellectuals are concerned with the value of ideas outside of careerism. The humanistic overtones in Hofstadter's definition of an "intellectual" and the dividing line he draws between living *off* or *for* ideas are relevant to

my own argument about the origins of debates about wit in the sixteenth century. Such distinctions are complicated, and there are good reasons to be skeptical of humanistic concepts such as "disinterested intelligence" and "radical criticism," especially if one begins to interrogate the contradictory nature of the words disinterested and radical. Both of these terms find themselves under significant duress in the context of a capitalistic system. Slavoj Zizek, for example, hypothesizes that "[academic] radicals invoke the need for revolutionary change as a kind of superstitious token . . . If a revolution is taking place, it should occur at a safe distance: in Cuba, Nicaragua, Venezuela . . . so that, while my heart is warmed when I think about the events far away, I can go on promoting my academic career" (404). Zizek's statement may be overly cynical, but the underlying point should not be dismissed lightly. Many of the promoters of supposedly radical intellectual discourse have a vested interest in the maintenance of the status quo.

While they can claim to disinherit the ideology of their literary progenitors, Modernists, New Critics, and Post-Modernists are essentially writing from and dependent upon the same economic base. Moreover, even the concept of what qualifies as intellectual labor is significantly problematic. As Antonio Gramsci points out, "in any physical work, even the most degraded and mechanical, there exists a minimum of technical qualification, that is, a minimum of creative intellectual activity" (8). What traditionally defines intellectuals as a group, Gramsci argues, is not the work they do or even their value system, but rather their relationships to institutions of power (the state, the church, and the capitalist entrepreneur). These same tensions between a humanist-based intellectual culture and capitalistic system in which they operate, I contend, have some significant origins in the debates about wit in the sixteenth century. I hope readers

looking for insight about these larger questions—readers who, despite objections and significant reservations, find themselves wanting to still identify with Hofstadter's conception of intellectuals in some fashion—will find personal and intellectual value in this study rather than mere professional or academic value.

For those with more specialized interest, this study also aims to fill a gap in academic literature about the early modern period. Adam Zucker's *The Places of Wit in Early Modern English Comedy* remains to date one of the only full length scholarly exploration of wit in the period that attempts to explore the term's sociopolitical aspects. Typically when wit is discussed by Renaissance critics their analyses tend to focus more heavily on the influences of the humanist rhetorical tradition.⁴ Even Zucker's study only tangentially addresss the concept of wit and its evolution in the period and focuses more heavily on the physical and ideological spaces that Renaissance plays construct to allow the disruption of the social hierarchy detailed above. Thus I believe this study will help deeper our collective understanding of the concept of wit and demonstate that the term's use in the period contains a richness that goes beyond associations with skillful employments of rhetorical devices or clever wordplay.

Methodology

Recovering the connotations of words and tracking the history of their evolution involves the monumental task of understanding the social and cultural matrices that imbue them with meaning. Bourdieu summarizes the problem this fact poses for modern scholarship succinctly:

⁴ For examples of discussions of wit in relation to humanist rhetoric in this fashion see Barbara Bowen's "Ciceronian Wit and Renaissance Rhetoric" and Arthur Kinney's *Humanist Poetics*. See also my discussion of critic's characterization of Euphuus' employment of wit in Chapter II pages 59-62.

Ignorance of everything which goes to make up the "mood of the age" produces a derealization of works: stripped of everything which attached them to the most concrete debates of their time (I am thinking in particular of the connotations of words), they are impoverished and transformed into the direction of intellectualism or an empty humanism. (32)

I have spent much of my academic life scribbling notes in the margins and arguing with colleagues about books and essays that I felt "impoverish" and "transform" texts in this fashion. Instead of reconstructing the "mood of the age," some of these academic efforts involve covert attempts to read canonical literature through the lens of modern political or cultural discourse ("empty humanism"). Others entail the application of highly sophisticated intellectual apparatus impelled by the competitive academic marketplace and its fetishized cult of originality ("intellectualism").⁵

In voicing concerns about these sorts of academic approaches, I do not align myself with the conservative branch of literary scholarship that openly attacks virtually all political or cultural readings of literature the way Harold Bloom does in the introduction to *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*. When Bloom famously refers to ideologically charged interpretations of Shakespeare as "French Shakespeare" and those who study it as "power and gender freaks," he irresponsibly dismisses any arguments regarding how ideology and power, then and now, construct interpretations of texts and authors (9-10). He does so under the assumption that the "aesthetic stance"

⁵ I somewhat contest Bourdieu's pejorative rendering of "intellectualism" in this passage if only because I believe intellectualism does not necessarily have to entail profoundly abstracted intellectual play. I would offer "pseudo-intellectualism" instead as a potentially more accurate descriptor for the phenomenon Bourdieu is indicting.

from which he reads is transcendent, universal, and objective and not itself a result of social construction. As Bourdieu points out,

There is in fact every reason to suppose that the constitution of the aesthetic gaze as a 'pure' gaze, capable of considering the work of art in and for itself, i.e., as a 'finality without end', is linked to the *institution* of the work of art as an object of contemplation, with the creation of private and then public galleries and museums, and the parallel development of a corps of professionals appointed to conserve the work of art, both materially and symbolically. (36)

Literary analysis that only relies on information gathered from the closed off symbolic field of literary production is severely limited in terms of what it can help us understand about the nature and function of literature. Critics who pursue such analyses, as Bourdieu argues, "forget that the existence, form and direction of change depend not only on the 'state of the system', i.e., the 'repertoire' of possibilities which it offers, but also on the balance of forces between social agents who have entirely real interests. . . ." (34). Yet there is also a danger in applying this notion of "real interests" in an overly determined fashion, a danger of interpreting the interests of individuals in a way that reduces literary analysis primarily to the field of external social or economic relations, of forgetting that, internally, the literary field entails its own system of values and beliefs that sometimes appear to run contrary to the concept of pure socio-economic determinism.

Thus both the error of myopically investigating texts primarily through the lens of modern economic and power relations and the error of assuming the absence of such relations—or, as Bourdieu elegantly renders it, the error of the "iconoclasts" and the error

of "believers"—should be avoided. I follow Bourdieu in thinking that the most effective method of understanding a particular period and the functions of the literary system within that period is to map out "the most concrete debates of the time" (32). As a result, this approach, rather than a larger theoretical paradigm, informs my own study on the function and evolution of wit.

Two Connotations of Wit

Understanding the debates about wit in sixteenth-century England is important because these debates center on tensions between early humanist and marketplace conceptions of literary value. In fact, as I will argue, the humanist discourse and the economic marketplace discourse come to gradually inform two different uses of the word wit in the period, usages which relate to the "before and after" of Samuel Johnson's aforementioned observation that the definition of wit had shifted, but also usages which are simultaneously in play, socially contentious, and part and parcel of a larger socio-economic transition.

While my study is limited to the sixteenth century, it should be noted that many of the characteristics that are frequently attributed to the early humanists are not exclusively the product of the sixteenth century nor even the early-modern period. For example, the educational treatise, which becomes a staple of sixteenth-century humanist discourse, has a long history extending from classical sources such as Isocrates and Quintilian. The medieval genre of *specula principum*, or advice books to princes, belongs to this same tradition. Additionally, while they mostly go unrecognized by sixteenth-century writers, fifteenth-century humanists such as Poggio Bracciolini and Guarino da Verona had significant influence on the early developments of humanism in England. My

exploration of humanism, since it cannot trace all antecedents, must necessarily begin rather abruptly.⁶

The early to mid-sixteenth-century humanists' employment of wit relates specifically to an individual's mental capacity, the application and development of one's wit. This meaning is informed by arguments about the proper investment of one's intellectual abilities for the betterment of society as a whole, arguments proposed by writers such as Desiderius Erasmus (1455-1536), Thomas More (1478-1535), Thomas Elyot (1490-1546), Roger Ascham (1515-1568) and Richard Mulcaster (1531-1611). While not all of these individuals express an explicit concern with the concept of wit, their arguments nevertheless influenced later discussions about wit and its abuse in the latter half of the sixteenth century. These writers made a profound impression on the English university systems and all who attended, and their arguments about education and the proper investment of intellect had a significant impact on shifts in the perceptions of literature and literary aesthetic. Moreover, these arguments empowered later, more direct arguments about literary value, such as those presented in George Puttenham's *The Art of English Poesie* (1589) and Philip Sidney's *The Defence of Poesy* (manuscript 1579; princeps 1595).

The second usage of wit, as indicated above, is revealed in discussions about the skillful deployment of language in written texts. This usage is obviously not entirely divorced from the former, but it often implied language filled with embellishments that revealed slippage and similarities between terms, language that multiplied or confused

⁶ For explorations of the precursors to early-Modern Humanism in England in particular, see Roberto Weiss's *Humanism in England during the Fifteenth Century* and Douglas Gray's "Some Pre-Elizabethan Examples of an Elizabethan Art." For a discussion of the concept of wit in the medieval era, see James Simpson's "The Power of Impropiety: Authorial Naming in *Piers Plowman*."

meanings beyond those commonly understood, or that highlighted the plasticity of words or concepts. This connotation was and remains to this day the most popular application of the term witty. In the last few decades of the sixteenth century, witty texts were in high demand. In fact, the employment of witty language was so prominent in the late sixteenth century that complaints about its overuse became frequent. A lavish display of verbal skill quickly became grounds for parody. For example, Shakespeare developed enough material out of concerns about a misuse of wit to write a play largely concerned with how an overemployment of wit empties language of meaning. The four lead female characters in *Love's Labour's Lost* constantly complain about the insincere embellishments in the language the men in the play use and they associate such embellishments directly with the concept of wit. When the Princess of France reproves one of her suitors, she complains, "I am less proud to hear you tell my worth / Than you much willing to be counted wise / In spending your wit in the praise of mine" (2.1.17-19). Shortly thereafter her lady in waiting, Katherine, states of her suitor, Dumaine, "Most power to do most harm, least knowing ill; / For he hath wit to make an ill shape good" (2.1.59-60). At the end of the play, Berowne recants,

O, never will I trust to speeches penn'd,
 Nor to the motion of a schoolboy's tongue,
 Nor never come in vizard to my friend,
 Nor woo in rhyme, like a blind harper's song! (5.2.402-405)

These are just a few examples of how the play functions to reprove an abuse of overly witty discourse, as I will demonstrate more fully in Chapter VI.

Such complaints in Shakespeare's play and elsewhere are largely about the devaluing of wit due to an oversaturation in the number of witty texts available to readers. To engage in displays of wit in a printed text is to attempt to literally capitalize on a popular commodity. To criticize wit is (often paradoxically) to market one's self as being above or against such attempts. Thus, discussions of this second connotation of wit in literature of the period are heavily invested in its status as a good in the economic marketplace. Being the savvy entrepreneur he was, Shakespeare both employs and criticizes the employment of wit simultaneously, as *Love's Labour's Lost* demonstrates.

Many professional writers, especially those who attended university, were encouraged—perhaps even indoctrinated—by early humanist rhetoric to believe in a cultural, moral, and political function of literature, one which established a higher set of criteria by which texts should be evaluated. Thus, they became heavily invested intellectually in the early humanist conception of wit. On the other hand, they were rewarded by the marketplace to offer up witty texts for the entertainment of the public and for their own personal economic gain. Thus, the application of wit can be viewed as a commodities exchange between these two systems of valuation: one humanistic, one capitalistic.

Obviously, these two systems are not always at odds. For example, in *From Humanism to the Humanities*, Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine track the evolution of Italian humanist thought through the Quintilian split⁷ and argue that the shifts in attitudes

⁷"The Quintilian split" refers to the break from traditional scholasticism by Lorenzo Valla and others who were highly influenced by the writings of Quintilian (35 CE-100 CE). Grafton and Jardine note, that "[b]y 1450 Valla was identified with a new movement among teachers of the *studia humanitatis* to rationalise and consolidate the intellectual foundation for humanistic studies" (67). For more on this topic see Grafton and Jardine 67-82.

and the appeal of humanism on the whole is largely based on economic factors. For example, they argue that,

as German printers settle in Italy, humanist grammars and commentaries began to be printed, and the basic skills thus became available to anyone with the money to buy books. If the humanists were to hold their value as innovatory teachers, they had to change their ways: to concentrate on dealing rigorously with difficult texts and their internal (and academically stimulating) problems. (62)

Grafton and Jardine are arguing that as the skills the humanists previously taught became more widely accessible, the humanist in turn began to emphasize the study of more difficult texts in order to ensure their social and economic capital remained intact. In short, economic concerns were always a potential motivating factor behind early humanist rhetoric.⁸ Nevertheless, we should be careful not to conflate a desire for subsistence or economic survival with having a purely profit driven motive. In his discussion of the publishing trade associated with humanist texts in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Ian Maclean notes,

While it was possible to become rich and accumulate goods, it is also true that many publishers harboured no more than the ambition to stay in business and survive crises. . . . To talk, therefore in terms of supply-side economics, with its emphasis on increasing incentive to produce, or sophisticated business strategies involving capital formation, or even

⁸ While Grafton and Jardine focus almost exclusively on the Italian Renaissance, their examples nevertheless demonstrate how economic motive and humanist thought were far from mutually exclusive.

business plans which provide clear guidance as to priorities and economic choices, seems anachronistic. (5)

If this statement is true for publishers, it is even truer for the less business-oriented humanist scholar, who benefits less directly from the sales of books and whose livelihood is generally not entirely dependent upon the book trade. Whether or not their civic ideals hold up under the scrutiny of many post-Modernist epistemologies, the early humanists' writings indicate underlying systems of beliefs in concepts such as truth, justice, and civic duty that seems to have legitimately motivated much of what they wrote, as I will demonstrate in Chapter II. Moreover, even where economic motivations are evident, a distinction between the influences *behind* their rhetoric and the influences *of* their rhetoric needs to be made. Whether or not the early humanists' argumentative positions were facilitated by attempts to gain an individual economic advantage in a competitive academic marketplace, their arguments were often explicitly at odds with the larger economic system of valuation, and many later authors' attacks on writing for economic motive are heavily influenced by this rhetoric.⁹ The relationship between these two value systems is neither entirely complementary nor a matter of simplistic binary opposition. The tensions between humanist rhetoric and market forces can only be understood by examining their relationship in more specific contexts. This study proposes to examine these tensions in fuller detail by looking at the attitudes of a small group of professional writers in the latter half of the sixteenth century, most of whom find themselves squarely

⁹ As an aside, I would once more like to note that this struggle between cultural and economic value should not be altogether unfamiliar to modern scholars who often face the same dilemma. In fact, in the last chapter of *Scholarship, Commerce, Religion: The Learned Book in the Age of Confessions, 1560-1630*, MacLean makes a direct comparison between Melchoir Goldast (1576-1635) and a recently published essay by Martha Nussbaum (1947-) by arguing that both "were right to try to eliminate from their writings the taint of protocapitalist mercantilism" (246).

at the crossroads of humanistic influence and marketplace demand and whose attitudes towards the concept of wit demonstrate the way each negotiates this territory.

Four Writers in Marketplaces of Wit

Despite the fact that the English economy experienced significant inflation during the second half of the sixteenth century, inflation that caused the buying power of English consumers as a whole to suffer, the number of books published in England increased dramatically. In *On Demand: Writing for the Market in Early Modern England*, David Baker discusses the concurrent growth of London as a commercial center and the growth of consumer demand in England in the late 16th and early 17th centuries. He points out, for example, that despite inflation the number of books published tripled between 1530 and 1600 (7).¹⁰ The scandalous debasing of silver coins that occurred in the middle of the sixteenth century contributed significantly to the period's inflation. According to David Landreth, the amount of pure silver used in coin production between 1541 and 1551 shifted from 11.1 ounces per 12 ounces to a staggeringly low 3 ounces out of 12 (20). Landreth points out that this debasement was designed as a money making scheme on the part of the crown, but one that also benefited anyone who owned silver goods (i.e., the noble class as a whole): "Inflating the value of the coinage relative to silver meant that everyone who owned silver, either as coin or as plate (i.e., household implements made of silver), would profit by bringing that silver to the Mint to be melted down and recoined in the new standard, and—while the value returned to the customer as coin was

¹⁰ For more information on the conditions of the late sixteenth century English marketplace, see Baker 1-34.

more and more entirely extrinsic—for each use of the services of the Mint the Crown kept its own, grossly inflated seigniorage in pure silver" (20).¹¹

This situation of general economic inflation combined with an increase in book production led many writers to complain openly about how the literary marketplace was flooded with texts. In Thomas Nashe's *Pierce Penniless* (1592), the eponymous Pierce (arguably a thinly veiled representation of Nashe himself) raves continuously about his inability to make a living on his writing and argues that, compared to those engaged in the vicious competition of the literary marketplace, writers of sermons have it easy. In his introduction to *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit* (1579), John Lyly states that he is not publishing his text in an attempt to gain popularity, since the printing press never "any time lieth still" (8). He goes on to conclude, "He that cometh in print because he would be known is like the fool that cometh into the market because he would be seen" (8). Behind Lyly's reference to the stigma of print lies the implication that, even if he wished to be exposed, the fool would be lost in the crowd, as is the worthwhile book.

Many writers in the period were caught between two systems of economic exchange in their attempts to make a living: an older system of aristocratic patronage and the newly emerging one of the literary marketplace. There is a good deal of evidence that the amount of patronage available relative to the number of writers was in rapid decline. For example, Paul J. Voss explains, "The final decade of Elizabeth I's reign witnessed a sharp decrease in the number and generosity of literary patrons" (733). Voss associates this loss with a number of factors, including the profound proliferation in the number of

¹¹ It should also be noted that this debasement was the origin of Gresham's Law, as established by the Tudor financier Thomas Gresham (1519–1579). Gresham hypothesized that *bad money* (i.e., coin that is severely debased) will drive *good money* (money that is more pure in terms of its precious metal content) out of circulation.

printed texts and the scarcity of economic resources among would-be patrons. Similarly, "Elizabeth and Literary Patronage," a dated but still useful study by B. B. Gamzue, compiles the overwhelming contemporary evidence for the decrease in the amount of patronage offered by Elizabeth herself in the latter part of her reign. Additionally, numerous firsthand accounts from authors such as Thomas Nashe, Edmund Spenser, and Philip Sidney detail individual author's frustrations and disappointments over the difficulties in gaining financial support from patrons during the last few decades of the sixteenth century.

Thus on one hand the amount of patronage available was in decline. On the other hand, the public demand for literature was still in its infancy, and there was considerable competition for a fairly small audience. Thus in a metaphorical sense, and to paraphrase Matthew Arnold, many found themselves, "Wandering between two [ideals], one dead / The other powerless to be born" ("Stanzas," 85-86). The traditional ideal of the stable patron-poet relationship, a relationship that would allow for artistic freedom from material concerns, was, for many, a fading dream. Meanwhile, the slightly more egalitarian notion that a humanistic conception of literary value could serve as a guiding force—as a purveyor of tastes and attitudes within the marketplace and the culture at large—was a concept that, for most, seemed unlikely to be realized.

Among those caught between these two ideals of a healthy patronage system and thriving consumer demand were a group of writers that has in the past been referred to as the university wits. The term was popularized by George Saintsbury in 1887, but it may originate from a phrase used by Robert Greene in *Groatsworth of Wit*, where Greene recants his own misdeeds and offers advice "To those Gentlemen his Quondam

acquaintance, that spend their wits in making Plaies" (141).¹² This group (which includes such writers as Thomas Nashe, Christopher Marlowe, John Lyly, and Greene himself) was not widely referred to collectively as the "university wits" until the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, when the term became frequently used almost as a metonym to discuss almost any professional writers from the period who were not William Shakespeare.¹³ It remained a term in use through the first half of the twentieth-century but has largely fallen out of popular use in the last fifty years. One notable exception to this absence in modern literary discourse, however, is *The University Wits*, a recent series published by Ashgate. Another is the late twentieth-century critic Richard Helgerson, who frequently employs the term in manner to that of earlier scholars.¹⁴

One reason for the term's disappearance from the majority of academic writing is perhaps related to the increased pressures towards specialization among literary scholars and within English departments. Writers who study individual members of this group are likely to find problems with discussions that refer to them as a monolithic entity. Moreover, since the term was frequently employed by critics in the first half of the twentieth century in a way that would obfuscate important distinctions, there are a couple of good reasons to hesitate about generalizations that stem from this sort of collective terminology. First, despite Greene's description, not all of the university wits' literary careers were focused equally on playwriting. Thomas Nashe, Robert Greene, and John

¹² There has been some debate about the authorship of *Groatsworth of Wit*. The text was published in 1592 by Henry Chettle after Greene died earlier the same year. For more details, see Chapter V, page 135, footnote 58.

¹³ The full list of writers who are usually associated with this group are John Lyly (1553-1606), Thomas Lodge (1558-1625), Robert Greene (1558-1592), Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593), George Peele (1556-1596) and Thomas Nashe (1567-1601).

¹⁴ For example, in *Forms of Nationhood*, Helgerson claims, "Like Tarlton and Wilson, Shakespeare was a player who collaborated in generating the plays his company put out [in the 1590s]. But others—the 'university wits' most prominent among them—were being engaged and being recognized solely as writers" (199).

Lyly, for example, were and remain better known for their prose works. Second, as will be demonstrated over the course of this dissertation, members of the group had different attitudes about the value of literature and about the newly emerging reading public.

Nevertheless, the grouping of these writers is useful specifically because their association with Greene helps to establish a compact social nexus by which to study the relationship of professional writers to humanist culture and the economic marketplace in London during the last few decades of the sixteenth century. Even the origin of the group's collective identification—Greene's use of the term "spent their wits"—has immediate humanistic and economic implications. Taken literally, it refers to the commercialization of intellectual endeavors. If they "spent their wits," what did they hope to get in exchange? What did they lose in the transaction and what did they perceive their audience as gaining? While these questions may seem initially trite, they are important because they are directly tied to the paradoxes inherent in the concept of intellectual labor in a marketplace driven by material exchange. These questions are also directly related to an exploration of how the value of intellectual labor attempts to establish itself in relation to emerging ideas of economic value in the early capitalist period in England.

I have chosen four writers for this project: John Lyly, Robert Greene, Thomas Nashe, and William Shakespeare. I have chosen these writers particularly for the contrasting perspectives they offer on the relationship between wit, humanist culture, and the economic marketplace. Moreover, the line of influence between early humanist rhetoric about the proper employment of wit and these writers is fairly direct and linear. Throughout this dissertation, I hope to demonstrate how Renaissance debates about wit

and witty discourse betray concerns about the economic realities of a newly emerging marketplace and concerns about the potency and viability of the humanist project in light of these economic realities. After examining the first three writers individually, I will return to Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost* to explore how this reconstructed discourse on wit informs our view of the play and foreshadows some of Shakespeare's own struggles between market demand and humanistic conception of literary value. Overall, I hope to show that, in a marketplace that had not yet established a clear discourse for the newly emerging concepts involving economic exchange, let alone those involving intellectual property, these debates about wit were at the center of concerns about literature's commercial and cultural value.

The second chapter explores the humanist origins of wit through an examination of some of the most influential writers of the early half of the sixteenth century. This chapter tracks the evolution of the concept of wit as it applies to intellectual capability, its proper application, and the related concept of civic virtue. It traces the use of the word wit from early writers such as Erasmus, Elyot, and More to slightly later ones such as Philip Sidney. None of these writers could reasonably be called professional writers, since most of them (with the exception of Sidney) had established positions as scholars, and none of them were writing directly for a literary marketplace as a means to make a living. Nevertheless, these writers and their conception of wit significantly influence the rhetoric employed by the first generation of professional writers in the latter half of the sixteenth century who were more directly subjected to those marketplace forces. I discuss the way these writers associate wit with social hierarchy and civic virtue and argue that there is a gradual expansion of the socio-economic group associated with wit.

The third chapter explores John Lyly's conception of wit. It focuses on the stark contrasts between *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit* and *Euphues and His England*. I argue that the first *Euphues* text was intended as a satire of the abuse of witty discourse at the court and relies heavily on Ascham's conception of *quick wit* for its characterizations of wit in general. While the tone of this text is complex and the style sometimes serves to undermine its message, Lyly's first work ultimately identifies itself strongly with the university and with the early humanist thinkers' sensibilities, albeit with some significant alterations in terms of its skepticism towards the concept of wit itself. Meanwhile, the second *Euphues*, I argue, attempts to negotiate a compromise based (ironically) on the first text's popularity among the ladies at court. Rather than condemn witty discourse, *Euphues and His England* recants much of the earlier text's arguments and serves as an apology for courtly displays of wit—and by proxy, for textual ones. This compromise is largely a result of the economic pressures faced by Lyly and the emerging popularity of the euphuistic form. I explore how the cultural phenomenon of the euphuistic form and the witty language the *Euphues* texts employ relate directly to unresolved arguments in humanist culture regarding the relationship between form and content. I ultimately argue that the *Euphues* novels function to secularize the concept of wit by de-emphasizing its association with divinity and civic virtue.

The fourth chapter focuses on Thomas Nashe and his attempt to construct a binary opposition between true humanist wits and marketplace hacks. Critics have long found it difficult to categorize Nashe's socio-economic position in terms of his relationship to other professional writers in the period. I attempt to address this difficulty by focusing on Nashe's constructed identity as an author caught between these two systems of valuation

and by exploring how his relationship to them is characterized by his discussions about wit and its abuse. My reading of Nashe in this chapter relies heavily on *Pierce Pennilesse* and how it satirizes marketplace conception of wit's abuse, but I also explore how Nashe's arguments in *Anatomy of Absurdity*, the preface to Greene's *Menaphon*, and other works attempt to come to terms with the very binary opposition he helps to construct. His conception of "wit," I argue, remains central to his attempts to bargain for cultural and economic capital throughout his literary oeuvre and provides a way to better understand his position in the literary marketplace.

The fifth chapter examines Robert Greene's much discussed recanting of his earlier texts. I investigate the concept of wit as employed in early and mid-career texts such as *Anatomy of Absurdity*, *Myrrour of Modesty*, and *Menaphon*. These texts, I argue, continue the project started by Lyly in terms of how they further deconstruct the association between wit and virtue and further push towards an aestheticizing of wit by associating it directly with the eroticized game of courtship. Afterwards, I examine *A Quip for an Upstart Courtier* and two of Greene's late career renunciation pamphlets: *Groatsworth of Wit* and *Greene's Vision*. I maintain that the language used to discuss wit in these pamphlets ultimately blurs distinctions between marketplace value and humanist conceptions of literary value. Thus wit in Greene's work functions somewhat as an antipode to Nashe. Whereas Nashe's texts attempt to construct clear binaries between humanist wit and marketplace abuses of wit, Greene's texts ultimately serve to collapse such distinctions.

In the final chapter, I examine how the cultural and political arguments about wit are presented in Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost*. It is my hope that, given the

previous four chapters of the function of wit, my reading of the play will shed new light on the cultural subtexts of the debates surrounding wit and its relationship to literary value. I argue that the play as a whole functions as a metonym for the debates about humanist wit and marketplace demand but that the play remains indifferent to these debates and sees the humanist employment of wit and marketplace displays of wit as part of a single continuum.

CHAPTER II

HUMANIST WIT

Introduction

Gaining a better understanding of late sixteenth-century English writers' conception of wit requires a close examination of the term's inherited connotations from early sixteenth-century humanist progenitors. This task is not a simple one, since most scholars tend to agree that the texts that are collectively associated with "humanism" in the early modern period do not offer anything that resembles a coherent ideology or even a paradigmatic shift from what came before. For example, Hanna Gray notes that Renaissance humanism "contained many schools of thought" (497). Daniel Wakelin refers to it as a "paradoxically medieval trend" and argues that "[a]ctivities not ideas are what we can trace in the [early humanist] manuscripts (8-9). Along similar lines, Paul Oskar Kristeller claims that "Renaissance humanism was not as such a philosophical tendency or system, but rather a cultural and educational program . . ." (22). One of the largest dividing lines traditionally drawn between humanist pedagogy and the medieval scholasticism that came before it is humanism's shift from a focus on dialectic to an emphasis on rhetoric, that is to say a shift away from an education focused heavily on logical analysis and towards one more focused on persuasive and elegant speech and writing. This shift is often cited as developing because of the discovery of new Latin texts by writers such as Cicero and Quintilian, because of the focus these writers place on virtue, and because of the influx of Greek scholars into Greece and Italy after the fall of Constantinople in 1453.

Yet even this shift in focus is easy to overemphasize since the early humanists did not reject dialectic outright. In fact, Socrates, the father of the form, is praised as the best single author for study by Erasmus. Similarly, Elyot writes, "But above all other, the works of Plato would be most studiously read, when the judgment of a man is come to perfection" (100). *The Republic* is such a foundational text that nearly every humanist writer who presented a treatise on education not only refers to Socrates and Plato frequently but also felt the need to include long sections on the proper physical exercise for young boys, despite the fact that their target audience were largely noblemen whose children were not being trained to be military guardians the way Plato's were. Nevertheless, many early humanists did disagree with the amount of emphasis placed on various dialectical *categories*.

A good example of this shift in focus away from dialectic categories is found in Thomas More's letter to Martin Dorp. As Daniel Kinney points out, Moore's letter to Dorp is "one of the first systematic defenses of humanist method, encompassing a critique of Scholastic grammar, dialectic, and theology" (180). Dorp previously attacked Erasmus's *In Praise of Folly* and charged Erasmus with valuing grammarians more than he valued theologians and dialecticians. More argues in response that neither More nor Erasmus reject the value of dialectic exploration, but merely views it as an overextended practice. Alistair Fox characterizes the general position established by More succinctly: "If a heretic be unlearned, [More] says, he would not understand the subtleties of [this sort of] theological reasoning; if he be learned, there will never be an end to the debate" (210). One example from his letter to Dorp that More provides in order to elucidate his view on dialectic is the supposed difference between the statement "two glasses of wine I

drank" and "I drank two glasses of wine." More not only saw such categorical distinctions as pedantry but worried about the efficacy of an education that was based upon seemingly trivial distinctions. The narrator of More's *Utopia* takes up this argument directly when he proclaims, "In private conversations of close friends, this academic philosophy is not without its charm, but in the councils of kings, where great matters are debated with great authority, there is no room for these notions" (99). This line of argument establishes a reoccurring theme throughout *Utopia*. For example, Raphael Hytholoday describes the island of Utopia as one that has not discovered "Small Logic" and indicates that they therefore know nothing of dialectical categories such as "suppositions" (159). Thus More believes that there is a common sense approach to distinguishing meaning, one that the abstract categories derived from the the dialectic tradition often ignore. But neither he nor many other humanists reject the value of dialectical exploration outright.

The ideas of the early humanists were not revolutionary, nor did they make any tremendous breaks from what came before. Despite the impact their work may have had on the larger culture, their texts are often more microscopic than macroscopic, less concerned with establishing an overarching worldview and more concerned with the particularities of pedagogy. In his famous attack upon humanism in the opening of *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama*, C. S. Lewis argues that we often anachronistically associate humanism with enlightenment values. He goes on to humorously dismiss humanism as little more than a "pseudo classical virus" (25) and "an obscurantist movement" (31). But even if we accept Lewis's claim that humanism is more parasite than proprietor, its dissemination and influence can hardly be denied.

Writers such as Desiderius Erasmus, Thomas Elyot, and Roger Ascham were not only influential in formulating and popularizing rhetorical techniques that every English school boy was forced to practice, they were also responsible for forming some of the foundational early modern arguments for literary value, many of which are still often employed today. Writers for generations afterwards refer to these authors and their works by name and frequently employ them in reverent tones while positioning the merits of their own works, the works of others, and the value of literature in general.¹ In short, the early humanists played a tremendous role in shaping a new intellectual culture. Moreover, a conversation about wit in terms of its attributes and its perceived cultural and political value was of central import to many of their texts. Wit was, for many of these writers, synonymous with the intellect and its cultural productions. The line of influence between the early sixteenth-century humanist scholars and later Renaissance authors is so direct that it can almost quite literally be tracked from book to book. Thus, I will begin this chapter by investigating a chain of authors who had a significant contribution to the history of wit in early modern England. I have primarily focused on texts by these authors that demonstrate a line of influence by direct titular reference to one another. As such, this exploration is not meant to be all inclusive, but I hope to use it to demonstrate a cohesive narrative for the history of a particular usage of wit, a usage whose connotations fall into common acceptance by the last few decades of the sixteenth century.

¹ For example, Richard Mulcaster references Thomas Elyot in the opening of his own educational treatise *Postitions* (1581) and expresses dismay at being compared to Ascham. In the preface to *Menaphon*, Thomas Nashe writes that Elyot's "elegance did seuer itselfe to from all equals" (313) and later refers his readers to Ascham's *Scholemaster*, "where he hath most learnedly censured both our Latine and Greeke Authors" (337). These are just two examples of many.

Roger Ascham's *The Scholemaster* (1570) is a central humanist text that helps us to understand the connotations of wit in late sixteenth-century England. It provides a direct link between early humanist teachings and many late sixteenth-century literary productions. At one end of the chain, Ascham's arguments about the proper use and abuse of wit are influenced by a long line of earlier humanist thinkers' treatises on education. At the other end, Ascham's treatise and his division between "quick wits" and "hard wits" directly influence Lyly's *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit*, the first of a series of literary texts that make increasingly overt attempts to literally capitalize on the popularity of witty discourse in the English literary marketplace. But before discussing *The Scholemaster* directly and its role in the debate about wit, I want to provide a brief overview of a few of its humanist precursors in order to place it in its proper context.

Divine Wit

The Scholemaster is part of a well-established tradition of Renaissance educational treatises, one of the most influential of which is Desiderius Erasmus's *The Education of a Christian Prince* (1516). Erasmus's treatise went through ten editions in his lifetime, and he dedicated a specially prepared copy to Henry VIII in 1517. *Education* constructs a foundation for many of the arguments later humanists employ in their own discussions about the function and value of literature in education. The core of Erasmus's argument is that just, selfless, and benevolent rulers are needed to create social stability and that a proper education helps to instill these virtues. He argues, for example, that in order to establish a solid moral foundation, fables should be the first type of literature taught to princes when they are young and that classical Greek and Roman history can provide a good role model for royalty if taught as cautionary tales. By

contrast he argues that Arthurian romances are "very poorly done, stupid, and fit to be 'old wives' tales,' so that it would be more advisable to put in one's time reading the comedies or the legends of the poets instead of nonsense of that sort" (200). As we shall see, these ideas are frequently repeated by subsequent humanists in their own educational treatises.

Erasmus's conception of literary value is largely based upon the mimetic power of literature, a concept dating back to Plato's *Republic* and before² but perhaps most famously represented in early modern England by Philip Sidney's formulation in *The Defence of Poesy*: "Who readeth Aeneas carrying old Anchises on his back and wishes not it were his fortune to perform so excellent an act?" (95). The heart of the argument is that studying the noble acts of others, fictional or real, leads to a desire to emulate these acts. However, as will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter, Sidney's argument largely involves an inversion of the educational emphasis developed by Erasmus, since Sidney claims that literature is more effective than any other type of writing at encouraging moral behavior. *The Education of a Christian Prince* spends far more time discussing the value of studying philosophy and history than it does discussing the value of literature. Erasmus states in very qualified terms that, "While his pupil is still a little child, [the tutor] can bring his teachings through pretty stories, pleasing fables, clever parables. When he is bigger, he can teach the same things directly" (146). For Erasmus, literature is a very temporary heuristic device—not an essential one—that can be

² While Aristotle is most often associated with the concept of *mimesis*, Plato famously employs the concept in his discussion of the negative influence of literature in *The Republic* (i.e., he argues that literature that presents "immoral" behavior, such as a portrayal of Achilles' abandonment from the Trojan battlefield, and that it will encourage similar behavior in those who read it). This argument is a small but important part of Plato's attack upon poets and poetry. Curiously, while the early Humanists frequently refer to the brilliance of Plato and Socrates, they rarely address Plato's attack upon poetry. This task is generally left to their (mostly Puritan) detractors. For more on the humanist detractors and their arguments, see Peter Herman's *Squitter-Wits and Muse-Haters*.

employed to model good behavior when the child is young. In fact, his discussion of Aesop's fables is the only part of *The Education of a Christian Prince* that addresses that value of fiction for any extended period of time. Nevertheless, Erasmus's text sows the seed of an argument for the socio-political value of literary study that will grow over the next century.

While English humanists are sometimes inspired by Quintilianic sources,³ Erasmus' direct influence should not be underestimated. Not only do English writers frequently mention *Education of a Christian Prince* by name, but Erasmus's cultural influence in England is pronounced. Adam Fox estimates that Erasmus's influence on oral culture in England in general was so profound that his *Adages* is responsible for the popularity of over 4,000 proverbs, serving as the prototype for the genre of proverbial literature initiated in England by John Heywood's *Dialogue of Proverbs* (1546) (26). Even more directly, in his own educational treatise *The Boke Named the Governour* (1531), Thomas Elyot proclaims that *The Education of a Christian Prince* should be familiar to "gentlemen at all times and in every age as was Homer with the great king Alexander, or Xenophon with Scipio" (101). Erasmus's text is, in short, a bedrock of early humanist thought and, as a result, highly influential on the direction of Renaissance culture at large and of English culture in particular.

Admittedly, the textual evidence for humanist influence on late sixteenth-century writers in general and Erasmus's influence in particular are much more significant on the Continent than in England. Erasmus was primarily engaged in editing and commenting

³ Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria* in particular had a tremendous influence. William M. Smail, for example, observes that "Erasmus knew his Quintilian from end to end, and built up his own work on education on that foundation" (liii). However, Smail also notes that while Quintilian gained a "great popularity" among continental Humanists, "[i]n England he never commanded such esteem" (liii).

on Latin texts from Roman antiquity. Calculating a rough estimate of the surge in this sort of scholarship occurring between 1450 and 1600, Ian Maclean claims that while Germany and Italy accounted for 40 percent and 27 percent of publishing respectively, "Iberia, England, Scandinavia, and eastern Europe accounted for less than 8 percent total between them" (57). While there is nothing to prevent English readers from gaining access to overseas scholarship, Maclean's point that there was less scholarly investment in humanist productions in England is important to note. Nevertheless, there were a handful of English humanist authors during the middle of the sixteenth century who had substantial influence on later writers, who share much in common with their continental counterparts, and whose texts refer to *Education of a Christian Prince* by name. Moreover, these texts became widely distributed and widely read throughout England. So, while the number of documents that may be associated with humanism and humanist scholarship in England may be relatively small in comparison to continental output, in practice this simply meant that a smaller number of English texts had a greater cultural impact.

In terms of the study of the concept of wit, one of the most important of these early English humanist texts influenced by Erasmus is Elyot's *The Boke Named the Governour* (1531). Like Erasmus before him, Elyot proclaims that the function of education is to provide moral guidance for those in power. However, Elyot expands Erasmus's principle to make it directly applicable to the entire genteel class. Throughout his treatise, Elyot makes references to the naturalized system of social hierarchy through a number of means: the metaphor of the body politic, an extended allegory of a community of bees, and theological references to the great chain of being. However for

Elyot, the basic justification for social distinction is largely reliant upon "wit," and in *The Booke Named the Governour* we begin to see the fusion of the Erasmanian concept of civic virtue into the pre-existing English concept of wit.

As explained in Chapter I, the English word *wit* and its association with intellectual capacity has a long history that dates back to at least the tenth century and possibly long before. But Elyot's usage of the term stands out specifically because of the way he encodes a naturalized social hierarchy into his usage of the term. He argues that "much like the angels," the upper class is "set in a more high place than the residue, where they may see, and also be seen, that by the beams of their excellent wit, showed through the glass of authority, other of inferior understanding may be directed to the way of virtue and commodious living" (45-46). This concept of authority being guided towards moral action by a proper education mirrors the argument presented by Erasmus in *Education of a Christian Prince*. But in Elyot's formulation, wit is an active agent in facilitating this process. It is thus associated with the light of divinity that gradually filters down in a hierarchy from God to the angels, from the angels to the nobility, and from the nobility to the common man. He goes on to clarify wit's relationship to social function in the following way:

So the husbandman feedeth himself and the cloth maker; the cloth maker apparelleth himself and the husband; they both succor other artificers; other artificers, them; they and other artificers, them that be governors.

But they that be governors (as I before said) nothing do acquire by the said influence of knowledge for their own necessities, but do employ all the

power of their wits and their diligence to the only preservation of their inferiors. (46)⁴

Here, Elyot makes a clear distinction between those who engage in manual labor, who enter a clearly established relationships with one another based on mutual benefit, and those that employ their "wits" for the suspiciously more ambiguous purpose of "preservation of their inferiors." This argument is a significant departure from Erasmus, whose treatise, as Lisa Jardine aptly characterizes it, is engaged in "realpolitik" and is concerned explicitly with "how to ensure that those born to rule are educated so as to govern justly and benevolently, and so that the prince's rule never degenerates into oppression" (vii). Elyot expands the educational agenda of Erasmus in order to apply it to all "them that be governors," i.e. to the entire class of land owning gentry, whose distinction is directly related to their possession of wit.

At the same time, while Elyot applies his arguments to a larger base, his formulation of civic virtue is, in other ways, more politically conservative than Erasmus's. Erasmus lays out a hierarchy of types of nobility whereby the highest form is "derived from virtue and good actions," the second from knowledge of "the best training," and the lowest from "family portraits and the genealogy or wealth" (151). For Elyot this hierarchy is virtually reversed. In Elyot's metaphysic, as quoted above, nobility implies intellectual capacity (or wit), which implies actions that "preserve" the common man. Another prime example of this line of argumentation can be found in his commentary on the social life of bees. Elyot claims that bees "hath among them one principal bee for their governor, who excelleth all other in greatness, yet hath he no prick or sting, but in

⁴ Here and throughout this dissertation I have attempted to maintain either the spelling in the original documents as cited or in the edited versions in use and have only made corrections in spelling and punctuation when significant typographical deviation indicates error.

him is more knowledge than in the residue" (50). The captain bee's knowledge and the application of his knowledge for societal improvement are directly derived from his nobility; as in Elyot's earlier discussion of wit, this knowledge filters down through the social hierarchy. According to Elyot, intellect, knowledge, and virtuous actions are not inherently types of nobility; they are the signifiers, not the signified; having wit does not make one a governor, but rather being a governor indicates that one has "excellent wit."

Moreover, *The Boke Named the Governor* also expands upon Erasmus's arguments about the application of education for societal improvement far beyond *The Education of a Christian Prince's* focus on tyranny, injustice, and social instability. Arguing against parents who dissuade their children from pursuing the art of painting, carving, or other "art commendable concerning invention," Elyot claims that this sort of parental disapproval has led to

the inestimable loss of many good wits, and have caused that in the said arts Englishmen be inferior to all other people and be constrained, if we will have anything well painted, carved, or embroidered, to abandon our own countrymen and resort unto strangers. (122)

Elyot's use of the phrase "loss of many good wits" implies the cultivation of wit in a way that somewhat contradicts his positioning of wit as a natural possession of the gentry. These contradictory impulses create a tension that remains unresolved throughout the text. More importantly, however, what is occurring in this passage is a widening of Erasmus's conception of civic virtue, of the idea of educating for the purpose of facilitating moral and just attitudes for societal improvement. Elyot extends this concept far beyond the monarchy to the entire genteel class and stretches the concern for societal improvement

so widely that it even includes the production of superior English consumer goods. As I will demonstrate in subsequent chapters, this type of expansion plays a significant role in shaping the conflicted identity of professional writers and their relationship to wit in the latter half of the sixteenth century.

Elyot's concern over the investment of wit or intellect towards the end of producing superior English goods is carrying the concept of social improvement far beyond the immediate territory of one's personal moral obligations into the realm of macro-economics. In fact, it is an argument that may seem to create complimentary linkage between early humanist rhetoric and the emerging capitalist value system. This point has not been lost on literary critics, some of whom have explicitly explored the relationship between humanist rhetoric and burgeoning capitalistic values. Lorna Hutson, for example, argues that the "spectre of inflation" colors the particular brand of humanism that develops in England. She points out that William Cecil (Lord Burghley) and Sir Thomas Smith expressed similar concern about England's trade deficit in the period and argues that it became a moral imperative for many humanist writers to attempt to curb the buying of imported goods. However, the relationship between humanist interest and economic concerns was, at best, a tenuous and lopsided one. As Hutson herself points out, "Consumer goods could be praised [by English humanists] only from a manufacturing point of view, as the creators of productivity and solvency among individuals. . . . From the consumption point of view, however, the story was different" (25). As Hutson rightly points out, attacking material consumption and associating it with idleness becomes a recurring theme in many mid- to late-sixteenth-century humanists' texts.

However, Elyot's text is far from being in complete collusion with this emerging market value system even from a supply side perspective. It would be a mistake to conflate the early humanists' ideas of literary utility with the ideas of economic utility into a totalizing worldview. This fact is important to remember because, regardless of the points of contact between them, the early humanist concept of the productive ends to which wit should be employed does not always neatly square with the values that might be attributed to a culture facilitating material production. Hutson uses a passage from *The Boke Named the Governour* where Elyot suggests engraving plates and vessels with "quicke and wise sentences" to categorize Elyot and other early humanists in a way that seems anachronistically to imply a larger ideology, one that uniformly promotes the principles of commercial utility and rejects the concept of leisure reading:

Elyot sees the capacity of images and sentences to quicken or stimulate the production of knowledge as in some measure compensating for the idle consumption of the time spent in feasting. Again, this recalls the prejudice against 'idle' reading, where time is spent in the pursuit of pleasure, without any compensatory development of the potential parts of the mind.
(51-52)

Elyot and the other early humanists undoubtedly viewed productive reading as the primary goal of a sound education. However, entire sections of Elyot's texts are also dedicated to enjoyment of music, dancing, and archery for the purpose of "refreshment" and "pleasure." A section on Virgil demonstrates this point aptly:

For there is not that affect or desire whereto any child's fantasy is disposed, but in some of Virgil's works may be found matter thereto apt and propise

[propitious]. For what thing can be more familiar than his *Bucolics*? Nor no work so nigh approacheth to the common dalliance and manners of children; and the pretty controversies of the simple shepherds therein contained wonderfully rejoiceth the child that heareth it well declared, as I know by mine own experience. In his *Georgics*, Lord what pleasant variety there is—the divers grains, herbs, and flows that be there described—that reading therein it seemeth to man to be in the delectable garden or paradise! What plowman knoweth so much of husbandry as there is expressed? Who delighting in good horses shall not be thereto more enflamed, reading there of the breeding, choosing, and keeping of them? (89)

This passage, like many others in *The Booke Named the Governour*, revels in the joys of leisure reading. Virgil is presented not as medicinal or even prescriptive but for the satisfaction of whatever the child's interest happens to be. Moreover, Elyot breaks with the common conceit that literature is only suitable for young boys. While the passage begins by describing the delight noblemen's children will find in Virgil's *Bucolics*, by the end Elyot is describing the "delight" all who love horses will experience as well. One could even say that this passage approaches Hofstadter's concept of *disinterested intelligence*,⁵ since here Elyot seems to almost forget the original agenda of his text and simply revels in his enjoyment of Virgil and the enjoyment he thinks it would supply all others, regardless of their position in the social hierarchy. In other words, this passage not only demonstrates an appreciation for texts outside of utility, it also demonstrates the

⁵ See Chapter I, pages 9-10 for a discussion of Hofstadter's concept of *disinterested intelligence*.

"uneconomical" way that Elyot approaches his text as a whole, with many tangential asides that do little to promote his larger argument.

Having discussed some of the significant nuances of Erasmus's and Elyot's texts, we are now prepared to examine Roger Ascham's *The Scholemaster* (1570), which in its presentation of wit is heavily inspired by both authors and arrives at a compromised position squarely between them. Ascham sets up his treatise as a discourse on the best way to train "good wittes," and he indicates via a gloss that the "chiefe pointes of this booke" are "of the nature, of quicke, and hard wittes: and the right choice of a good witte" (177). Like Erasmus and Elyot before him, Ascham works under the assumption that a sound education and classical Latin, and to a lesser extent Greek, will serve as a facilitator of civic virtue. Quick wits he later defines as those who "take his lesson readelie" and hard wits as those who "taketh it not so speedelie" (188). Ascham argues that quick wits are often favored by tutors with bad consequences, since they enjoy learning but lack long term dedication. These students, he argues, "may make the best Poetes, but not the wisest Orators" (189). Ascham, like Erasmus before him, relegates poetry to a lower form of social discourse. For Ascham, oration is associated with the great Ciceronian tradition of public speaking, which entails political and cultural efficacy.

He elaborates on this point:

For this ye shall finde most true by experience, that amongst a number quicke wittes in youthe, fewe be found, in the end, either verie fortunate for them selues, or verie profitable to serue the common wealth, but decay and vanish, men know not which way: except a very fewe, to whome paradventure blood and happie parentage, may perchance purchace a long

standing vpon the stage. The which felicitie, because it commeth by others procuring, not by their owne deseruinge, and stand by other mens feete, and not by their own, what owtward brag so euer is borne by them, is in deed, of it selfe, and in wise mens eyes, of no great estimation. (190)

Like Erasmus, Ascham draws a clear distinction between those whose behavior lives up to civic duty and those who merely have to rely on lineage for social distinction.

However, by defining those who fail to live up to these responsibilities as "quick wittes," he still, like Elyot, leaves room for the innate superiority of nobility's intellectual capacity, since hard wittes are "of deepe judgement, whether they write, or giue counsell in all waightie affaires" (191). For Ascham both noble birth and educational upbringing—or as he puts it "blood and happie parentage"—are necessary for the development of wit and civic virtue.

Yet regardless of type, wit in general, according to Ascham, is subject to corruption. One of the largest causes of the ruin of "good wittes" is the court, due to its shallow materialism and emphasis on fashion and ostentatious displays. He contrasts the bashful young reticent scholar with "some Smithfeild Ruffian," whom he describes as an individual who will,

take vp, some strange going: some new mowing with the mouth . . . som fresh new othe, that is not stale, but will rin round in the mouth: some new disguised garment, or desperate hat, fond in facion, or guarish in color, what soeuer it cost, how small soeuer his liuing be, by what shift soeuer it be gotten, gotten must it be, and vsed with the first, or els the grace of it, is stale and gone. (208)

Ascham's description of ostentatious linguistic display effortlessly dovetails into an attack upon clothing fashion. Part of Ascham's criticism here is based upon the consumer cycle with its persistent privileging of "some new" object of desire, whether it be a new "othe" or a new piece of clothing. This argument is an early example of the wide spread concerns about "new fangledness," as Sara Warneke has termed it. Concerns of this sort, Warneke argues, "had been growing since the early sixteenth century":

Many Englishmen, along with the character of Vincent in *Cyuiile and uncyvile life* (1579), were "sorye to see Englishmen, so apte to leaue their auicient good fashions, and fall into forrayen manners." As the sixteenth century drew to a close there was an overwhelming sense that foreign cultures were a threat to English culture. Inevitably, many authors connected the decline in their English cultural integrity with the Englishman's flawed nature—his love of novelties, particularly foreign novelties. (893)

Ascham's complaint lands firmly within this tradition as he complains about the emphasis on new phrases and new clothing, but underlying this complaint is a clear concern with those gaining the *appearance* of having risen above their proper station, intellectually or economically. The gap between appearances and reality makes up one of the central complaints of Ascham's text. He is heavily concerned with making sure students avoid the mere appearance of learning. He argues, for example, that he wants children to speak Latin but that many tutors seem to be concerned only with teaching by rote recitation: "Other would have them speake at all aduentures: and, so they be speakinge, to speake, the Master careth not, the Scholer knoweth not, what. This is, to seeme, and not to bee:

except it be, to be bold without shame, rashe without skill, full of wordes without witte" (185). For Ascham, wit is the antithesis of the appearance of knowledge without its substance.

According to Ascham, the problem with someone who resorts to an outward display of quick verbal wit is not only that he has not internalized the necessary lessons of the text, but also that he betrays the social structure in the same way as someone who dresses above his station. Both of these acts of performance undermine the social contract as outlined by Elyot, whereby those without wit engage in manual labor and those with wit are defined as gentility who work towards the "preservation of their inferiors" (46). The lineage of this naturalized association of innate wit with the gentility and of "quick wit" with marketplace obfuscation of social hierarchy significantly complicates a later generation of professional writer's attitudes towards wit's function.

Expanding Wit

In these early humanist writers' texts the role of literature gradually expands in its facilitation of civic virtue and an education in civic virtue expands to include more individuals.⁶ Nevertheless, Erasmus, Elyot, and Ascham remain fairly conservative in terms of how far they go in their recommendations of literature. They qualify their praise of literature by warning that it is best used as entertainment for younger children and by arguing that tutors should be wary of the parts of texts that are unsuitable for students.

⁶ One outlier to the larger trend in humanist thought is Richard Mulcaster who, by the end of the 1570s was the head of the second largest school in England. Unlike Elyot and Ascham, Mulcaster is not specifically concerned with the education of the gentleman and even emphasizes the value of an education in a particular trade. Mulcaster also indicates that he is suspicious of a dependence upon hierarchy and authority in a number of ways. For instance, he argues that individuals should avoid a dependence upon authority since "[i]t is no proufe, bycause Plato praiseth it, bycause Aristotle alloweth it, bycause Cicero commendes it, bycause Quintilian is acquainted with it, or any other else, in any argument else that therefore it is for us to use" (25). Unlike his humanist progenitors, Mulcaster also argues that when possible the children of the gentry should be educated in public schools with their personal tutor alongside them.

However, through the late 1570s and early 1580s the recommendation that literature be included in education begins to expand more dramatically, as is demonstrated in texts such as the introduction to George Gascoigne's *A Hundred Sundry Flowres* (1573) and Henry Peacham's *The Garden of Eloquence* (1577). The most popular and arguably the most influential example of this phenomenon is Philip Sidney's *The Defence of Poesy* (princeps c. 1595).

Even in manuscript form, *The Defence of Poesy* had a widespread following that only grew after its publication. The manuscript was widely distributed and there was large enough demand that a pirated print version titled *An Apology for Poetry* (1591) appeared ahead of the authorized posthumous version in 1595. As Stephen Mentz explains, "Elizabethan publishers clamored to print [Sidney's] unpublished literary works. He was the biggest game in town: a national hero, a Protestant martyr, and a superlative poet" ("Selling Sidney" 151). The fact that Sidney was looked upon as a generous patron in the 1580s and a nostalgically rendered chivalric hero in the 1590s made the influence of his arguments regarding literary value all the more potent.

Since Sidney's *Defence* is not an educational treatise in the direct tradition of Erasmus, Elyot, and Ascham, it is neither as concerned with wit as a concept nor with the development of intellectual culture as a whole. However, Sidney still employs the humanist conception of wit and evokes literature as a potent facilitator of civic virtue in a fashion similar to those earlier texts. For example, Sidney suggests that "if ever learning come among [the Indians] it must be by having their hard, dull wits, softened and sharpened with the sweet delights of poetry" (6). Curiously, Sidney's use of "hard wits" is somewhat antithetical to Ascham's, since Ascham uses the phrasing to imply

studiousness whereas Sidney's usage suggests stubbornness. Moreover, the mixed metaphor and complex parallelism of "softening" dull wits so that they may be sharpened, while somewhat confusing, is indicative of Sidney's employment of the euphuistic form recently popularized by Lyly and discussed in more detail in Chapter III.⁷ But also noteworthy is Sidney's reorganization of the normal educational process outlined by the earlier humanists. Whereas Erasmus, Elyot, and Ascham all argued for literature as a part of an education that would help to establish virtuous action, Sidney argues that literature "softens" the mind to prepare it to receive proper educational instruction. For Sidney, literature is not merely part of a well-rounded education; it is instead presented in this passage as the foundation which allows for a proper education. He argues that poetry is more effective than history or theology for moral training and that "as virtue is the most excellent resting place for all worldly learning to make his end of, so poetry, being the most familiar to teach it, and most princely to move towards it, in the most excellent work is the most excellent workman" (25).

Sidney similarly takes the early humanists' association of wit with divinity and the naturalized chain of being and puts it to work in defense of literary value:

Neither let it be deemed too saucy a comparison to balance the highest point of man's wit with the efficacy of nature, but rather give right honour to the heavenly Maker of that maker, who having made man His own likeness, set him beyond and over all the works of that second nature; which in nothing he showeth so much as in poetry, when, with the force of a divine breath, he bringeth things forth surpassing her doings—with no

⁷ Lyly popularized "euphuism" roughly a year before Sidney composed *The Defence of Poesy*. For more on the concept of the "euphuism," see Chapter III.

small arguments to the incredulous of that accursed fall of Adam, since our erected wit maketh us know what perfection is, and yet our infected will keepeth us from reaching unto it. (9-10)

In this passage, Sidney uses wit to denote the manifestation of intellectual capability in a way similar to Ascham and Elyot. But he goes one step further in assigning this capability as comprising the metaphysical core of poetry. *Wit as manifest in poetry* is the reflection of divinity in mankind, "the force of divine breath" that serves to civilize and regulate "infected will" or desire. This pairing of wit and will as opposites is a common proto-Cartesian conceit in the period, wherein will represents desires of the flesh in opposition to the guidance of the intellect.⁸ The material body and its productions (emotions, desires, and material goods) are rendered opposite and inferior to the productions of the mind (reason, virtue, and thought). In this way, Sidney's text works to eliminate some of the stigma of print and print's association with manual labor and production.

This work of solidifying literary production's association with wit continues into Sidney's generic classifications. Sidney proceeds to detail three different types of poetry, the first being that which directly represents the excellence of God, the second being that which presents truths about the external world (which he further divides into the categories of "philosophical," "moral," "astronomical," and "historical"), and the third

⁸ In fact, this pairing of wit and will as binary opposites has roots that far predate the Renaissance. As James Simpson notes, "In both political and ethical discourse throughout the later medieval period, improper and dangerous assaults on personal or political integrity are frequently described in terms of will gaining power over wit, or of sensual, singular, and 'privy' desire gaining control over the common profit of rational order" (153). Perhaps the most famous pairing occurs in Langland's *Piers Plowman*, which Simpson discusses at length (see Simpson pages 153-165). This pairing continued well into the sixteenth century. Along similar lines, a now non-existent play titled "Wit and Will" (1567) cited by Robert Greene also references the famous binary (D. Allen Carroll 305).

being that which is entirely of the poet's own invention. He argues that the third type is superior to the second by using a metaphor of two painters:

. . . this question ariseth betwixt [these second and third types] is such a kind of difference as betwixt the meaner sort of painters, who counterfeit only such faces as are set before them, and the more excellent, who having no law but wit bestow that in colours upon you which is fittest for the eye to see . . . For these third kind be they which most properly do imitate to teach and delight, and to imitate borrow nothing of what is, hath been or shall be, but range, only reined with learned discretion, into the divine consideration of what may be and should be. (11)

The phrase "no law but wit" is indicative of the highly privileged position the concept of wit had gained in the intellectual culture by the last few decades of the sixteenth century. Sidney presents wit as standing above state or natural law as the direct handmaiden of God.

Perhaps most importantly, after positioning literature as the veritable keystone to the achievement of humanist aspirations, Sidney makes a telling move in overtly associating this concept of civic virtue with the contemporary literary marketplace. Whereas the earlier humanists mainly use their association between wit and civic virtue to facilitate study of classical literature, Sidney pushes forward into more and more contemporary works, beginning with Greek and Roman antiquity and moving forward into Chaucer and then to *The Shepheardes Calendar*,⁹ the latter of which was published

⁹ It should also be noted that Spenser himself was also highly invested in this type of argument. The two primary themes running through E.K.'s epistle to *The Shepheardes Calendar* (1579) are the attempt to establish the literary tradition within which the work was produced and the argument for the "moral wisenesse" of the lessons contained therein. The long list of authors to whom Spenser is compared in the

just one year before Sidney is believed to have written *The Defence of Poesy*. He also ends his argument by making a case for the further patronage of professional writers and ends by cursing those who have "so earth-creeping a mind that it cannot lift itself up to look at the sky of poetry" to have "[their] memory die from the earth for want of an epitaph" (54). While it is clear that much of this section is a direct response to puritan attacks on contemporary plays and poets, Sidney's employment of the traditional humanist concepts as a defense of contemporary professional writers is a significant development. This shift of the argument for literary value into the realm of the contemporary marketplace is a radical expansion of the concept of literature as a facilitator of civic virtue.

Nevertheless, as Peter Herman explains, Sidney's attitude towards the value of poetry is not without its own reservations, and understanding these reservations is also important to understanding the function of wit in the period. Herman points out, for example, that no poetry appears in Sidney's list of recommended readings for his close friend Edward Denny, cousin to Walter Raleigh and a soldier in several Irish expeditions. Moreover, Herman goes so far as to argue that *The Defence of Poesy's* structure indicates Sidney's ambivalence:

The twists and turns in the *Apology* argument result from Sidney's internalization and partial approval of anti-poetic sentiment. For all the marvelous, courtly humor of this text, there is a genuine pathos underlying Sidney's dilemma.

Certainly, one part of his psyche agreed with the various humanist defenses of

epistle—Chaucer, Virgil, Theocritus, Cicero, Boccaccio, Mantuan, Petrarch, Sanazarus, and others—serves a double purpose. By evoking their names, this list is arguing for the importance of a literary tradition while at the same time attempting to use that tradition to establish Spenser as the author who can "warn (as he sayth) the young shepheards . . . his equalls and companions of his unfortunate folly" (505).

poetry from which he drew most of his arguments, but on the other hand, not only did Sidney's religion contain within it a significant strain of antipoeticism, [but] defending poetry would have constituted a political liability as well. . . . (93)

Herman argues that Sidney's reservations about the value of poetry are most prominently demonstrated by the way *The Defence of Posie* functions as a response to Stephen Gosson's *School of Abuses* (1579), a puritan pamphlet attacking contemporary literature and theatrical productions as morally corrosive. Despite the fact that Sidney is responding to Gosson's argument, Herman claims that Sidney fails to address some of Gosson's more potent arguments directly and even betrays sympathy for many of them. For example, Herman argues that Gosson "does not so much misunderstand the nature of fiction as accuse poets of using fiction to mask corruption," a charge which Sidney leaves "unmet, if not admitted as valid" (86). Moreover, Sidney and Gosson seem to share many of the same sensibilities. As James A. Williams points out,

Sidney's earliest biographers, Fulke Greville and Thomas Moffet, report Sidney's fervent—indeed at times apparently life-threatening—devotion to study of Latin and Greek historiography and political philosophy as well as his enthusiastic participation in Accession Day tilts, both of which activities suggest Sidney's determination to cultivate a reputation for sobriety, great learning, and dedication to martial endeavor—the very qualities Gosson asserts are sorely lacking among his contemporaries. (642)

The relationship between Sidney's and Gosson's texts may seem somewhat tangential to this discussion of the history of wit, but it provides a convenient avenue to explore the so

called "detractors" of humanist thought and to examine the ways in which the humanist discourse about wit's function also pervades the writings of authors who are seemingly less sympathetic to the claims of humanist thought.

While it is sometimes positioned as a quintessential Puritan critique,¹⁰ Gosson's *School of Abuses* is still somewhat sympathetic towards early humanist perspectives on the relationship between literature and civic virtue. In fact, Gosson's argument is largely predicated on an agreement with the mimetic theory of literary value. Early on in his text Gosson admits, "I must confess that poets are the whetstones of wit notwithstanding that wit is dearely bought: where honie and gall are mixt, it will be hard to sever the one from the other" (10). He goes on to point out that Plato "shut [poets] out of his schoole, and banished them quite from his common wealth, as effeminate writers, unprofitable members, and utter enimies to vertue" (10-11). It is notable that Gosson is not disparaging wit itself in his essay, nor does he deny that wit is associated with virtue. Rather he is arguing that in plays and poetry there is a blending of wit with unvirtuous behavior that serves to taint the former. As Arthur Kinney points out, the argumentative structure of Gosson's text is broken up into three types of arguments modeled after the three *genera dicendi* of classical rhetoric (epideictic, forensic, and deliberative). Kinney explains that this pattern following the humanist argumentative structure since "[a]ll three types of argument serve the Aristotelian ends of rhetoric, to teach, delight, and persuade" ("Stephen Gosson's Art" 44). Furthermore, Gosson's argument is filled with classical exempla used to help facilitate his argument. Thus, attempting to categorize Gosson's text in binary oppositional terms, with Puritan critique on one side and humanist

¹⁰ See for example Edmund Morgan's "Puritan Hostility to the Theatre" and David Hawks's "Idolatry and Commodity Fetishism in the Antitheatrical Controversy."

arguments on the other, is too simplistic a division. More immediately relevant to the history of wit in the period is the fact that even in Gosson's text, perhaps the most popular and effective attack on literature in the period, wit is not pejorated nor is the concept of civic virtue disputed.

What becomes clear in examining the function of wit in these English humanist texts and even "anti-humanist" texts such as Gosson's is that wit becomes a keystone for many of their arguments. It serves as the link between the divine qualities of God and mankind and it serves in poetry to promote civic virtue. Neither Elyot nor Ascham nor Sidney displays a strong suspicion of wit. Rather, in their works, wit is usually presented as a divine quality, as a facilitator of understanding, or as the evidence of insight and rhetorical eloquence in a literary text. The associations of wit with shallowness, untruthfulness, or mere surface level wordplay come, for the most part, much later. To see the beginning of this pejoration of wit, we must turn towards John Lyly, wit's first prodigal son.

CHAPTER III

JOHN LYLY'S PRODIGAL WIT

Introduction

In act 1 of Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost*, Berowne delivers an anti-intellectual speech wherein he attacks the value of studying. He concludes that those who know the name of every star in the sky "Have no more profit in their shining nights, / Than those that walk and wot not what they are" Afterward, King Ferdinand remarks, "How well he's read, to reason against reading!" (1.1.92-96). A similar reaction is likely to be experienced by first time readers of John Lyly's *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit*. For a text that proclaims the dangers of an excessive reliance on wit and wit's potential abuses, *Euphues* is excessively witty. But while both Berowne's speech and Lyly's text ironically employ the tools of their intellectual culture against intellectualism, these acts are indicative of a larger cultural trend. Ben Jonson, for example, displays a similar attitude in "A Fit of Rhyme against Rhyme." Jonson's poem attacks poetry for having become "the rack of the finest wits," and he hints that the rebirth of interest in Greek and Latin texts has not been positive, at least in terms of literary productions. He declares that there is "Not a poet in an age / Worth crowning" (26-27) and argues that the renewed interest in Latin verse has only led to abuse:

Greek was free from rhyme's infection,

Happy Greek by this protection

Was not spoiled.

Whilst the Latin, queen of tongues,

Is not yet free from rhyme's wrongs,
 But rests foiled. (31-36)

Here, Jonson complains that Renaissance writers' emphasis on studying Latin over Greek resulted in an abuse of the former and an accidental protection of the integrity of the latter. Arguments like Jonson's are far from anecdotal. As the influence of the humanist educational agenda spread throughout England, so did skepticism about the efficacy of the early humanists' pedagogy and rhetoric. Moreover, as Jonson's description of "wits" torturing of poetry hints, the early humanists' conception of wit began to evolve more pejorative connotations. Lyly's *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit* and *Euphues and His England* are perhaps two of the earliest and most influential demonstrations of a witty interrogation of the concept of wit.

The cultural context of the two *Euphues* novels' original publication reveals much about their relationship to humanist culture. The first printings of *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit* (1578) occurred just as a large investment in education was beginning to pay dividends throughout England. According to official records cited by Lawrence Stone, the average matriculation rate¹ at Cambridge between 1550 and 1560 was 150 students per year, but by 1580 more than 400 were attending the university.² Cambridge historian James Mullinger observes a similar increase in the issuance of bachelor's degrees by the university from 28 degrees conferred in 1558 to 114 in 1570 to an astounding 277 in

¹ The term "matriculating" has a specific meaning in the period that differs from modern day usage. As Johnstone Parr explains, "The academic year was three terms designated by Venn as Michaelmass (i.e., October, November, December), Lent (January, February, March), and Easter (April, May, June). Having been admitted to a college in one of these terms, the student was required to 'matriculate' (i.e., take the oath of fidelity to his Alma Mater); when college officers sent the Matriculations List from each college to the University Registry, the student thereon were officially recorded as members of the University" (52).

² Unless noted otherwise, all statistics in this section are taken from those collated by Lawrence Stone in his essay "The Educational Revolution in England 1540-1640" (1964). Though dated, Stone's essay is still referenced as an authority for this type of information due to its thoroughness.

1583 (Mullinger 114), an overall increase of 890 percent in the annual number of bachelor degrees issued over the course of 25 years. For comparison, the current higher education boom in the United States has resulted in a jump from about 995,000 bachelor degrees conferred in the 1987-1988 academic year to 1.8 million bachelor degrees projected for the 2013-2014 academic year, an increase of only 81 percent.³ Similar records at Oxford during the period indicate that the number of students matriculating was around 100 in 1570, but nearly 400 by 1580. Moreover, Lawrence Stone argues that these figures are probably conservative:

For Oxford, the only lists to have been collated with the matriculation register are those of Brasenose, Oriel, and Wadham Colleges. The register did not get properly into its stride until 1581, when a new statute concerning matriculation was introduced and a vigorous drive against non-registration produced a record haul of 793 men, most of whom had already been in residence for several years. (48)

However, by 1590, the average number of enrolled students had dropped back well below 300 students at both Oxford and Cambridge despite the fact that the records for these last two decades would include students that would have previously gone unrepresented before the new legislation was in effect.⁴ Thus, the sharp rise and subsequent decline in enrollment is likely to be even more severe than early twentieth-century scholars originally thought. Stone hypothesizes that the decline may be partly the result of Puritan

³ Statistics for annual bachelor degrees conferred in 1987-88 and projections for 2013-14 are taken from the *Digest of National Education Statistics*. See Table 33 and Table 236 in the *Digest of National Education* for a complete compilation of these and other statistics.

⁴ The general trends cited Stone are also confirmed by Johnstone Parr, who, in the context of discussing Robert Greene's education, points out that "Cambridge in Greene's day was growing apace" with only 28 baccalaureate degrees conferred in 1558 versus 278 in 1583, the year Greene graduated (52).

skepticism toward the universities after Whitgift was appointed archbishop of Canterbury in 1583 and partly a result of economic factors (50-51).⁵

It is no coincidence that the increase in college attendance aligns with the rise of the popularity of John Lyly. The two *Euphues* novels went through 30 editions by the time Edward Blount published Lyly's *Six Court Comedies* in 1632, and nearly half of these editions were printed within ten years of the first novel's publication, between 1578 and 1588. Thus, the apex of Lyly's popularity occurred during the exact period that saw a rapid increase in university attendance. Nearly four decades later, Blount goes so far as to present Lyly as a national icon due to his widespread influence during this period:

Our nation are in his debt for a new English which he taught them.

Euphues and his England began first that language. All our ladies were then his scholars, and that beauty in court which could not parley

Euphuism was as little regarded as she which now there speaks not French.

(xxi-xxii)

Yet Blount's cultural framing of Lyly is partially a result of a hard sell by an editor who had little reason to believe the material he had gained the rights to publish would grant him significant returns. As noted by Lyly's most recent editor Leah Scraggs, by the time Blount was publishing his edition of the plays in 1632, the "spate of editions [of *Euphues*] that had turned their author into a literary phenomenon was finally coming to an end" (1).

At the very least, Blount was clearly protesting too much when he declared in that same

⁵ In particular, Stone cites "high taxes," "trade dislocation," and "famine prices" as the most prominent economic factors that drove the economic down spiral (50-51). He also points out a similar trend in the rapid increase and subsequent decline at the Inns of Court, which also offered advanced educational and vocational training, particularly for lawyers and members of the gentry (51). According to records for the entrants at the Inns of Court, between the mid 1570s and the mid-1580s there is around an 80 percent increase in enrollment (from 125 students per year to around 225). By 1590, however, enrollment was back down over 25 percent (from 225 to below 175).

preface of Lyly that "[o]blivion shall not trample on the son of Muses," since by the middle of the seventeenth century Lyly was practically a footnote in literary history. Nevertheless, for a brief period of time, Lyly cast a wide shadow, and he established perhaps the first large trend of wit in print in the early modern English marketplace.

Aside from the immediate popularity and direct influence of his own texts, Lyly's influence on other authors during the 1580s was also pronounced. Many of his contemporaries went so far as to present their own texts as sequels to *Euphues*, using both the title of the work and names of characters from Lyly's two texts as marketing techniques to sell their own books. Scragg provides just a brief list of some of these:

. . . the highly polished prose style became the model for courtly discourse, while the euphuistic mode, the names of the central characters, and the concerns explored in the two parts of the work lived on in a host of sixteenth-century compositions designed to capitalize on Lyly's success. Melbancke's *Philotimus: The War Betwixt Nature and Fortune* (1583), Greene's *The Mirror of Modesty* (1584), and his later *Euphues, His Censure of Philautus* (1587), Lodge's *Rosalynde*, with its elaborate subtitle, *Euphues' Golden Legacy: Found after His Death in His Cell at Silixedra Bequeathed to Philautus' Sons Nursed Up with Their Father in England* (1590), all bear witness to the impact of *Euphues* on the imagination of Lyly's contemporaries and the multifacetedness that permitted its reworking. (17)

As Scragg indicates, *Euphues* became so popular that it not only led to numerous writers using titular references to it in an attempt to market their own books, but it even came to

define a specific rhetorical nomenclature—the euphuism,⁶ a concept which not only became associated with a dominant form of writing and speech for nearly a decade, but also played a very formative role in establishing the criterion for what would be considered "witty" prose.

Attempting to answer the question of what made the two *Euphues* texts so popular, Richard Helgerson concludes, "Style is usually the answer, the wittily patterned artifice of Lyly's prose" (*Elizabethan Prodigals* 59). There is good justification for this reasoning as firsthand accounts from the period readily back up the assessment. In a passage from *A Discourse of English Poetrie* (1586), William Webbe celebrates Lyly's mastery of eloquent rhetoric as indication of his wit:

Eloquence hath attained in our Speeche because it hath had the helpe of such rare and singular wits. . . . Among whome I think there is none that will gainsay, but Master John Lyly hath deserved moste high commendations, as he hath stept one steppe further therein than any either before or since he first began wyttie discourse of his *Euphues*, whose works, suredly in respect of his singular eloquence and brave composition of apt words and sentences, let the learned examine and make tryal thereof, through all parts of Rethoricke, in fitte phrases, in pithy sentences, in galant tropes, in flowing speeche, in plaine sense (F1v)

As Webbe's praise indicates, Lyly's *Euphues* novels were appreciated at least partially because they demonstrated a deft mastery of the rhetorical techniques promoted by the early humanist writers.

⁶ As will be discussed later in this chapter in more detail, a euphuism is a statement or expression that resembles Lyly's characteristic style of prose, primarily one that combines a heavy usage of alliteration with antithetical pairings.

To this end, it is nearly universally agreed that the tools of Lyly's trade are, as John Dover Wilson puts it, "the fruits of humanism" and much of the scholarship on Lyly has centered on the stylistic debts that Lyly owes to his humanist progenitors. However, by focusing primarily if not exclusively on rhetorical or stylistic associations between Lyly and other authors, many of Lyly's critics obfuscate important distinctions between the *Euphues* texts and what came before them. Warwick Bond, for instance, documents at length various examples of rhetorical techniques that appear in both Lyly's *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit* (1578) and George Pettie's *Petite Palace of Pettie His Pleasure* (1566–7). These purported stylistic similarities range from simple concepts such as the use of alliteration, repetition, and rhyme to more sophisticated devices such as parisonic anithesis and transversion. As will be discussed later in this chapter, however, Lyly's and Pettie's texts are narratively and thematically very different, especially when it comes to their conceptualization of wit. Similarly, in his mid-twentieth-century biography on Lyly, John Dover Wilson argued at length that the primary influence of Lyly was Thomas North's *The Dial of Princes*, a 1557 translation of Antonio de Guevara's book by the same name. Even though the narrative of Lyly's *Euphues* has little if anything common with *The Dial of Princes*, Wilson argues that the stylistic similarities betray a direct line of influence.

One problem with these types of arguments for direct textual association or influence based on stylistic analysis is that such arguments are largely subverted by critics' own admittance that these rhetorical techniques were fairly ubiquitous in the period. For example, Wilson's argument for Guevara as a significant influence on Lyly largely relies on generalities about the euphuistic form originating in Spain and evidences

the popularity of Spanish literature and Guevara's text in particular in England during the period.⁷ Discussing the cultural similarities between Spain and England, Wilson claims, "[I]t may be noticed that English and Spanish conditions of intellectual life, if we shut our eyes to the religious differences, were very similar at this time" (25). This statement entails a very big "if" and is demonstrative of one of the problems with tracing influences solely through stylistic comparisons of form or genre absence of content. Another problem with this mode of analysis is that separating style from content obfuscates the way the two can work hand in hand to create meaning.

Even modern critics of Lyly sometimes fall partially into the same mode of analysis of separating style from content in a way that obfuscates the deeper associations between them. Writing about the deeper themes of the first *Euphues* novel, Arthur Kinney observes,

Euphues is far more than a work of mere Lucianic teasing or a display of nimble wit—that belongs to the putative protagonist Euphues (by his very name) in his fallen state. Rather, Lyly is too keenly aware of the deep crevices of incongruity in humanist thought . . . as an heir to a rhetoric and system of thought which, making all things possible, guaranteed none of them as probable. (*Humanist Poetics* 148)

Here, Kinney positions *Euphues* "display of nimble wit" as somewhat separate from the more substantial commentary present in the text. However, the relationship of Lyly's texts' presentation of wit to arguments about the value of rhetorical eloquence as a facilitator of civic virtue is much more intricate than it may first appear. While Kinney does admit that "[i]n Lyly style and significance can never be divorced" (*Humanist*

⁷ For more on the popularity and influence of Spanish literature in Renaissance England, see Wilson 21-25.

Poetics 146), neither he nor other critics have fully explored the relationship between Lyly's usage of wit and that of his humanist progenitors.

Aside from the direct titular reference to analyzing wit, Lyly pronounces at the opening of *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit* that he has set out to demonstrate "the follies of [Euphues'] wit" and compares his anatomy of the topic to a surgeon who "maketh the anatomy [and] showeth as well the muscles in the heel as the veins of the heart" (28). In short, Lyly goes to great lengths in his introduction to establish the fact that he intends to offer a thorough investigation of the concept of wit. Yet surprisingly few critics have discussed Lyly's portrayal of wit in a substantial way outside of the type of stylistic analyses mentioned above. As I will argue, understanding the stylistic sensibilities of the two *Euphues* novels and the ends to which they are employed requires understanding these texts' relationships to the concept of rhetorical displays of wit. An examination of the *Euphues*' novels employment of and commentary on humanist wit reveals in ways these works question the presupposed utility of rhetorical wit and both texts ultimately betray a compromised relationship between wit and humanist thought.

Rhetorical Wit

Lyly's prose sensibilities and his cultural appeal are indeed largely a result of the influences of the humanist curriculum, but to explore how the *Euphues* novels' employ the concept of wit more fully, we must first take a step back and discuss the concept of rhetorical wit and its relationship to the education boom in England. As discussed in Chapter II, writers such as Elyot, Ascham, and Sidney argued that the purpose of education was to instill some form of civic virtue, and this belief strongly affected their perception of the function of intellectual capacity, or wit, and its purported role in society.

Wit was associated with divinity and nobility and was to be applied towards improving the commonwealth. However, the specific pedagogical techniques these writers promoted also played an important role in the evolution of the concept of wit, especially in terms of its usage as a criterion for determining literary merit. The early sixteenth-century humanists emphasized a devotion to the art of rhetoric as a sufficient means to develop civic virtues, and for them the employment of eloquent rhetoric came to define what it meant to write well. As C. S. Lewis wryly put it in his attack upon humanism, "If the Middle Ages had erred in their devotion to that art [of rhetoric], the *renascentia*, far from curing, confirmed the error. In rhetoric, more than anything else, the continuity of the old European tradition was embodied" (61). In fact, one of the largest dividing lines traditionally drawn between medieval scholasticism and humanist pedagogy is the shift in emphasis from dialectic to a larger attentiveness to rhetoric.⁸ The former involves logical dissection and categorization whereas the latter is concerned more with tools considered necessary for persuasive writing and speech.

Essentially, early sixteenth-century humanists considered eloquent writing and speech to be necessary skills for the establishment of civic virtue and classical rhetorical training was viewed as the means by which this goal could be accomplished. This belief was widespread among scholars in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. As Hanna Gray explains,

The bond which united humanists, no matter how far separated in outlook or in time, was a conception of eloquence and its uses. Through it, they shared a common intellectual method and a broad agreement on the value of that method. Classical rhetoric—or classical rhetoric as interpreted and

⁸ For more on the shift from medieval to humanist pedagogy see Chapter II, pages 20-22.

adapted in the Renaissance—constituted the main source for both. It provided the humanists with a body of precepts for the effective communication of ideas and, equally important, with a set of principles which asserted the central role of rhetorical skill and achievement in human affairs. (498)

Just as intellectuals in the period were referred to as "wits," their "common intellectual method" of eloquent rhetoric became associated with a display of wit. Moreover, as Gray point outs, this dedication to eloquence and rhetoric is largely responsible for establishing the early humanists' conception of literary value. While Gray focuses primarily on the Italian humanist of the fifteenth century, much of her argument also applies to the sixteenth-century British humanist. Elyot, for example, vehemently takes up what he explicitly calls a "defense of poets" in arguing for the value of the works of Horace, Plautus, Martial, and others on the grounds that they are eloquent writers "who in the Latin do express them incomparably with more grace and delectation to the reader than our English tongue may yet comprehend" (116). Ascham devotes the entire second half of *The Scholemaster* to outlining and discussing advantages of the "six ways appointed by the best learned men, for the learning of tonges, and encrease of eloquence" (242). These methods include double translation, *paraphrasis*, *metaphrasis*, *epitome*, *imitatio*, and *declamation*.⁹ Ascham argued that the employment of these pedagogical techniques would help the student internalize the rhetorical eloquence of the classical authors.¹⁰

⁹ In brief, double translation refers to the process of translating from one language into another and then taking the translated version and translating it back to the original. *Paraphrasis* means the process of paraphrase. *Metaphrasis* is the act of adapting verse into prose or vice versa. *Epitome* indicates summarizing. By *imitatio* Ascham means following or imitating another writer's style or argumentation. By *declamation* he means oral recitation.

¹⁰ This historical cause for the pedagogical shift towards promoting eloquence through teaching rhetoric is often cited as developing because of the discovery of new Latin texts by Cicero and Quintilian, because of

The precise relationship these writers saw between eloquent rhetoric and the acquisition of knowledge and attainment of virtue is well articulated in a passage from Henry Peacham's *The Garden of Eloquence* (1577). Peacham uses the metaphor of a garden—a favorite metaphor of many of the sixteenth-century humanists—to articulate what he sees as the important function of eloquence in any proper education. In describing his employment of both biblical and classical sources, Peacham reflects,

When of late I had considered the needfull assistaunce that the one of these do requyre of the other, that wisdom doe requyre the light of Eloquence, and Eloquence the fertillity of Wysedome, and saw many good bookes of Philosophy and preceptes of wysedome, set forth in english, and very few of Eloquence: I was of a sodaine mooued to take this little Garden in hande, to set therein such Fyгурatyue Flowers, both of Grammer and Rhetorick, as doe yeelde the sweet sauour of Eloquence & present to the eyes the goodly and bewtiful coulors of Eloquution: such as shyne in our speech like the glorious stars in Frimament, suche as beewtify it as flowers of sundry coullors, a gallant Garland: such as garnish it, as pretious pearles, . . . whose vtility is so great, that I cannot sufficiently praise them, and the knowledge of them so necessary, that no man can reade profytably, or vnderstand perfectlye, eyther Poets, Oratours, or the holy Scriptures, without them, etc. (A2v – A3r)

the focus these writers place on persuasive public speaking, and because of the influx of Greek scholars into Greece and Italy after the fall of Constantinople in 1453. Similarly, to ensure their economic survival, the humanist educators adapted the curriculum to match their new areas of expertise. See Chapter I pages 11-13 for more on the economic motives of the early humanist.

Peacham sees eloquence and wisdom as involved in a symbiotic relationship, the one serving to make the other more efficacious. Eloquence makes wisdom more "fertile" (i.e., more likely to be disseminated widely) and wisdom provides eloquence with "light" so that it may grow to full maturation. According to this perspective, practicing translation and reciting eloquent statements not only helps one to become a better speaker, it also helps to make one literally a facilitator of virtue. This idea perhaps stems from the concept that an individual's identity was inherently linked to one's social function rather than one's internal identity. In *Elizabethan Prodigals*, Richard Helgerson provides a succinct description of the metaphysical difference between the Renaissance individual's sense of self and the modern sense of self that helps explain this phenomenon. He argues, "The feeling that the true 'me' derives itself from a pattern outside the self may not be foreign to our age, but we nevertheless label the willing acceptance of such an borrowed identity an act of *mauvaise foi*, an abnegation of existential freedom. And though guilt does still accompany change, it is more likely to attach itself to stasis" (40). This phenomenon, Helgerson argues, did not exist in the early-Modern era. Peacham explicitly demonstrates this type of motivation when he goes on to claim that the aim of his book is "to profyte this my country, and especially the studious youth of this Realme" (A3v), a statement demonstrating the way eloquent rhetoric was immediately associated with civic virtue in his mind.

C. S. Lewis offers a description of what this type of educational emphasis *theoretically* meant for the emerging worldview of young students subjected to this type of training:

We must picture them growing up from boyhood in a world of 'prettie epanorthosis', paranomasia, *isocolon*, and *similiter cadentia*. Nor were these, like many subjects in modern school, things dear to the masters but mocked or languidly regarded by the parents. Your father, your grown-up brother, your admired elder schoolfellow all loved rhetoric. Therefore you loved it too. You adored sweet Tully and were as concerned about asyndeton and chiasmus as a modern schoolboy is about country cricketers or types of aereoplane. . . . High abstractions and rarified artifices jostled the earthiest particulars. They would have found it very hard to understand the modern educated man who, though 'interested in astronomy', knows neither who the Pleiades were nor where to look for them in the sky. (61-62)

Lewis paints a vivid and convincing portrait, not just of scholars, but of an entire society devoted to and "deeply concerned" with the art of rhetoric. Nevertheless, as the quotation from Berowne at the beginning of this chapter indicates, Lewis perhaps overstates the case. Despite the fact that Berowne clearly has a deep knowledge of the art of rhetoric, in challenging the idea of the value of knowing the names of the constellations, he would seemingly fall into Lewis's category of a "modern educated man."

Undoubtedly it is possible, probable even, that Berowne's perspective is that of an outlier, but the larger point to be made is that in examining the early humanist attitudes towards rhetoric, we should not automatically assume that their early humanists' pedagogical practices had the widespread effect they always intended or implied. At the very least we should acknowledge that practical realities inevitably lag behind the

promoted ideals in any given culture. A good example of this point is provided by Grafton and Jardine. After conducting a thorough exploration of pedagogical practices of the early Italian humanist pedagogue Guarino Guarini and his circle, they ultimately conclude that there is

a discontinuity between the eloquent gestures of outstanding individual humanists and the body of classroom teaching embedded in the narrative text. On one hand, we see the proliferation of discrete items of literary information, almost entirely without cohesive moral or intellectual comment. On the other, we see the effortless familiarity with antiquity of its literary products, the easy comparisons between authors and works, the critical acumen and moral poise of the ablest scholars and courtiers. (27)

Grafton and Jardine are alluding to the tremendous gap that exists between a belief in the ethical value of a Greco-Roman rhetorical education and the real world outcome of seemingly fragmented pedagogical techniques of the early humanists, techniques which focus heavily on the identification and replication of the employment of various rhetorical devices, but offer little in the way of a larger worldview. It is undoubtedly true that many students of humanist scholars gained an impressive familiarity with rhetorical terminology and an abundance of classical referents. However, there is a tremendous gap between the early humanist's promotion of a knowledge of various "discrete literary items" and students' whole cloth adoption of humanists' attitudes towards classical literature, let alone proof that studying the classical authors the humanists cherished led students down the path of virtuous thought and action. The cultural ramifications of this gap between humanist pedagogy and influence are still with us today and have resulted in,

as Grafton and Jardine put it, "the mystification of arts education—a connivance in overlooking the evident mismatch between ideals and practice—which has clouded our intellectual judgement of the progress and importance of the liberal arts from the days of Guarino down to T. S. Eliot, [F. R.] Leavis, and the twentieth-century guardians of European 'civilization' (xv). When this mismatch is pointed out, it still results in controversy, as it did when Stanley Fish recently argued that if reading great literature really made one more virtuous, then "the most generous, patient, good hearted and honest people on earth would be the members of literature and philosophy departments, who spend every waking hour with great books and great thoughts" (para. 10). As I will argue, however, this gap between virtuous rhetoric and virtuous identity, far from going unnoticed in the sixteenth century, formed one of the central tensions in the historical development of "wit," as is demonstrated in the two *Euphues* novels.

Prodigal Wit

In Lylyan phraseology, the style of the two *Euphues* novels could perhaps best be summed up as involving a play between aesthetic association and denotative dissonance. This trait is both the heart of the euphuistic form as employed by Lyly and the cause of the unstable relationship between his texts and their humanist progenitors. Lyly's "euphuistic" prose often features words and phrases that share phonetic or structural commonalities (whether in length of phrase, syntactical arrangement, rhyme, alliteration, or often a combination of these), whereas the central conceit of a given passage often relies on a deconstructive play of opposite meanings. The following warning delivered by Eubulus at the opening of *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit* serves as a good example:

The fine crystal is sooner crazed than the hard marble, the greenest beech burneth faster than the driest oak, the fairest silk is soonest soiled, and the sweetest wine turneth to the sharpest vinegar. The pestilence doth rifest infect the clearest complexion, and the caterpillar cleaveth unto the ripest fruit; the most delicate wit is allured with small enticements unto vice, and most subject to yield unto vanity. (37)

Structural parallelism, isocolon, and alliteration are used throughout this passage to phonetically and structurally associate words and phrases. As the previous cited passage from C. S. Lewis points out, these techniques are all ones that were emphasized by humanist educators throughout the latter half of the sixteenth century and ones that serve as apt demonstrations of what they would consider "eloquent" prose. But what distinguishes Lyly from his humanist influences is how the energy of the sentence comes from the way the language is emptied of meaning; the humanists' attempt at uniting eloquent speech and virtuous action is severely compromised in Lyly as concepts are played against each other and sometimes even reveal a shift into or a containment of their opposite. Prime examples of this trait from the aforementioned passage are "the most appealing fruit being infested with worms" and "the sweetest wine turning into the most sour vinegar." This penchant for playing at opposites separates Lyly so dramatically from his contemporaries that Leah Scragg even goes so far as to hint that Lyly seems strikingly modern. She claims that his "dictum that there is 'nothing' constant but 'inconstancy' (p. 236) has at last proved valid," and she argues that post-modern sensibilities and "contemporary interests in the process of signification has afforded [Lyly's] destabilization of meaning a new topicality" (1). Whether or not one agrees with Scragg's

insinuation that modern worldviews dictate radical subjectivity, the very fact that Lyly could be positioned in a way that reinforces such a perspective indicates a profound deviation from humanists' attitudes.

More immediately relevant to the evolution of the concept of wit, Lyly's text presents a similar "destabilization of meaning" in the early humanists' usage of the term, both in the passage cited above and in the text as a whole. To our modern sensibilities, Eubulus' association of wit with manipulation, vice, and vanity may not seem that surprising. But the tight adherence to parallelism in this passage indicates that Lyly intends this association to be a conscious inversion, a subversive playing of opposites just like the other concepts he is describing. He intends the reader to marvel at his association of wit with vice and vanity just as they would the association of fair silk with soiled clothes or the green birch with a burning fire. The rhetorical structuring of the passage only functions effectively if the reader sees a consistent pairing of opposites throughout.

According to Warwick Bond, Lyly's characterization of wit is the first during the period to contain an overtly negative connotation in this manner. Bond was the first of Lyly's scholars to point this out; however, Bond only mentions it in passing and does not provide any further explanation as to how or why Lyly's text pejorates the term *wit* in this fashion. Richard Helgerson, however, elaborates slightly on the denotative shift that allows Lyly to make this new association:

For Gascoigne, Ascham, and the earlier pedagogical writers, a quick wit meant a quick memory, the most useful intellectual quality in an educational system that put such emphasis on getting one's lesson by heart. For Lyly, wit resides rather in the tongue than in the memory. Wit is the

skill at repartee required for success in the sophisticated courtly
conversazione: readiness, eloquence, and aptness of response.

(*Elizabethan Prodigals* 61)

Whereas the early humanists characterized wit as a trait that allows for knowledge acquisition, Lyly characterized wit as the result of that acquisition. To put it another way, wit in Lyly's texts exists on the opposite side of the epistemological gap from the stated intention of the humanist lesson. As defined by Lyly in the opening of the text, "sharp wits" among students are not indicative of the ability to thrive in an educational environment, but rather they indicate an ability to produce "fine phrases, smooth quips, merry taunts—jesting without mean, abusing mirth without measure" (32). This depiction is a stark contrast to the ways wit was characterized by the early humanist and it is what allows Lyly to associate wit with vice and vanity. As discussed in the previous chapter, Thomas Elyot presents wit as a divine intellectual quality possessed by God and angels, which filters down through the social hierarchy. Ascham is more discerning. He divides the type of wit possessed by students into the two categories of quick learner and the studious pupil and argues that the latter is more desirable. However, he never goes so far as to outright assert that wit itself is a character trait that makes someone innately prone towards vice. In Lyly's text, the association between Euphues' wit and his wayward activity is not a fleeting one or even merely a game of verbal playfulness. Instead, it forms the central conceit of the entire text.

Before exploring Lyly's unorthodox employment of wit more fully, it may be useful to recount some of the primary features of the narrative. At the opening of the novel, Euphues, the novel's protagonist, travels from Greece to Naples and finds himself

debating an old man named Eubulus, who offers Euphues advice because he recognizes Euphues' gift of "pregnant wit" (35). Eubulus advises Euphues to use his intellectual gifts wisely and warns him of the corruption of Neopolitan society. Euphues dismisses this argument with an eloquent and sophisticated rebuttal involving the argument that nature rather than nurture shapes behavior. He then proceeds to spend his time in Naples going to lavish dinner parties with his friend Philautus. At one of these parties, he meets Lucilla, the daughter of Don Ferarado. Lucilla has been promised to Philautus, but Euphues betrays his friend by courting Lucilla in secret. At first she feigns rejection and the two engage in long discourses about the nature of love. Eventually Lucilla accepts Euphues as a suitor. Euphues informs Philautus of his courtship of Lucilla, and Philautus renounces his friendship. Shortly thereafter, Lucilla rejects Euphues and falls in love with Curio. Euphues then retires from life at court, declares that he has seen the error of his ways, and promises to devote his life to study. At this point the format of the book shifts. The second half of the text is presented as a series of epistles in which Euphues offers advice to others. The first set of exchanges is with his former friend, Philautus. In these, Euphues apologizes for his behavior and attempts to persuade Philautus to mend his own ways and to reject life at court. The final exchange involves a series of letters between Atheos, an atheist, and Euphues in which the latter eventually convinces the former that true wisdom can be found only in Christianity.

The stark contrasts between Lyly's use of wit and those of his progenitors begins to become more apparent when we compare Lyly's texts to those often cited as influencing their development. One of the most important of these is Roger Ascham's *The Scholemaster*. *Euphues'* eponymous protagonist's name is derived from an archetype for

a particular kind of student described by Ascham. According to Ascham, Euphues is "he, that is apte by goodnes of witte, and appliable by readines of will, to learning, hauing all other qualities of the mind and partes of the bodie, that must an other day serue learning, not trobled, mangled, and halfed, but sounde, whole, full & hable to do their office" (194). Lyly's Euphues offers an immediate contrast to Ascham's. While Lyly's protagonist is clearly intellectually and physically gifted in the way Ascham describes, he lacks "goodness of wit" and a "readiness of will to learn" at the novel's opening. In fact, in his preface Lyly announces that he sets out to document "the follies of [Euphues'] wit" (28), and in the opening pages of the text, the narrator insists that there are "none more witty than Euphues, yet at the first none more wicked" (33).

The influences of Ascham's text on Lyly's do not end with character of Euphues. It could also be argued that the setting and central narrative conceit are loosely inspired by Ascham, who warns parents not to let their children travel to Italy because while "tyme was, whan Italie and Rome, haue bene, to the greate good of vs that now liue, the best breeders and bringers vp, of the worthiest men . . . present maners, do different as farre, as blacke and white, as virtue and vice" (223). Ascham's criticisms of Italy in *The Scholemaster* appear to be primarily religious in nature. Later in his text he claims that the Inquisitors in Italy "ouersee that Christes trewe Religion set no sure footing, where the Pope hath any Jurisdiction" (235). In terms of specific evidence for corrupting influence, he offers the following:

I know of diuerse, that went out of England, men of innocent life, men of excellent learnyng, who returned out of Italie, not onely with worse maners, but also with lesse learninyng: neither so willing to liue orderly,

nor yet so hable to speake learnedlie, as they were at home, before they went abroad. . . . tha Italie that is now, is like Scilia that was then in all corrupt maners and licenceious of life. (226)

This attitude is reflected in Eubulus's warning to Euphues at the opening of *The Anatomy of Wit*. He describes Naples as a place filled with "drunken sots" and "lascivious" women and laments that Euphues ever traveled to his country (36-37).

Yet Euphues defies the warnings of both Ascham and Eubulus by ignoring these warnings and familiarizing himself with the Neopolitan court. Moreover, the central narrative subverts the very educational principle being promoted by Ascham and Eubulus. Ascham declares that "Learning teacheth more in one yeare than experience in twentie . . . And surlie, he that wold proue wise by experience, he maie be wittie in deede, but euen like a swift runner, that runneth fast out of his waie, and vpon the night, he noweth not whither" (214). Eubulus likewise asks, "Is it not far better to abhor sins by the remembrance of others' faults than by repentance of thine own follies?" (37). But the overarching narrative of *The Anatomy of Wit* demonstrates the opposite message. Euphues, despite his mastery of rhetoric and classical reference, ultimately only learns by experience. As Helgerson notes,

Euphues and Lucilla make nonsense of talk about nurture. Both discover that the exemplary patterns of behavior culled from antiquity are amoral in their effect. Those patterns are mirrors in which we see ourselves with unequaled clarity. But though they advance us in self-knowledge, they do nothing to increase our moral self-control. . . . it is clear that nothing,

certainly no packaged wisdom, has the strength to divert them from their fated course. (*Elizabethan Prodigals* 63)

Lyly's *Euphues*, like Ascham's, is characterized as being gifted in wit. But in Lyly, wit does not allow Euphues to flourish in classical studies and to internalize and promote the concept of civic virtue. Rather it only allows him to become an egotist that rejects all advice. Meanwhile his experiences in Italy, rather than corrupting him, ultimately provide a corrective lesson. Both the character and the setting of Lyly's texts have analogs in Ascham, but Lyly's text contradicts the purpose to which Ascham uses them.

Another text that is frequently mentioned as influential on *The Anatomy of Wit* is George Pettie's *Petite Palace of Pettie His Pleasure* (1556-57) a collection of short myths and fables aimed at teaching the dangers of love. As discussed earlier, Bond argues that Pettie's text was highly influential on Lyly's prose stylizing, and he documents rhetorical techniques that appear in both Lyly and Pettie at length. Narratively and thematically speaking, however, Pettie's text has little in common with Lyly's. *Petite Palace* is a recounting of six classical myths, all of which focus on the question of the value of love, whereas the narrative presented in *Euphues* is largely believed to be Lyly's own invention. Pettie opens his text by describing Iphis, one of the book's mythological subjects, in the following manner: "so the more noble blood he came of, and the finer wit he was endued withall, the sooner he was made thrall and subject to love" (3). Wit is not being presented as the cause of Iphis' folly in this passage any more than nobility is. Rather both are being positioned as traits that should have prevented folly but unfortunately did not. Furthermore, whereas Lyly announced in his introduction that his goal is to

demonstrate the folly of wit, Pettie begins with a description that presents folly and wit as directly antithetical:

Many are of the opinion that the virtues of love are very many, and that it is of force to reduce us from savageness to civilness, from folly to wit, from covetousness to liberality, from clownishness to courtliness, yea, from all vice to all virtue. . . . I see not that we may more justly say, that the inconveniences of love be infinite, and that it bringeth us from modesty to impudency, from learning to lewdness, from stayed firmness to staggering fickleness. (1-2)

Here one can see why Bond would argue for Pettie's stylistic influence on Lyly. Both make use of alliteration and antithesis in a highly concentrated form. Lyly's description of "fairest silk, soonest soiled" and his observation of sweet wine turning to sharp vinegar are similar in both style and structure to Pettie's interplay of clownishness and courtliness, vice and virtue, learning and lewdness (37).

However, as this passage also demonstrates, Pettie does not use the play of opposites to deconstruct the very concept of opposition, which Lyly does frequently. In Pettie, vice neither turns into virtue nor learning into lewdness. The oppositions remain as stark contrasts rather than collapsed binaries. More importantly, in this passage Pettie positions love, not wit, on the side of impudence and fickleness. This pattern is consistent throughout. Pettie describes suitors as "some with wit some with wiles" (33), making a clear distinction between intellectual capacity and sophistry. He laments "rage without reason" and compares it to "will without wit" (9). Wit is "by God endued" (126) and "a good scholar" is defined as he who is "endued with good wit" (151). Time and

again, wit is presented as a positive trait. Pettie even goes so far as to argue that women are superior to men because of their innate wit:

But what should I rehearse examples of the politic and government of women, whereas laws, the only ground of all good government, were first invented and made by Ceres, a woman? Therefore to the third point, which is valiant courage, where we ourselves confess them to be nothing inferior unto us. . . Besides that, how much weaker their bodies are than men's, so much more strength and virtue is contained in their minds. For it is the justice of God commonly to supply the debility of the body with the might of the mind . . . we see that those children which are destined to death in the prime time of their life, are far more witty, discreet and perfect in every way, than those who have long time granted them to live on earth. (159-160)

Far from pejorating wit, Pettie actually disrupts the historically misogynistic associations of women with deception and manipulation, arguing that their wit is, instead, proof of their superiority.

While critics such as Bond and Helgerson have mentioned Lyly's negative presentation of wit in passing, one surprising aspect of the novel's presentation of wit that has been overlooked is how the use of wit is somewhat racialized in Euphues' portrayal. For example, when Euphues is warned by Eubulus to avoid corruption, he responds by arguing that if he were born with a "good nature" then his nature could not in "any ways be altered by education" (38-39). The concept of "nature" Euphues references involves

an innateness predicated on race and this is made clearer by the examples Euphues uses to justify his claim:

Do you not know that which all men doe affirm and know, that black will take no other colour? . . . That Nature will have no course after kind? That everything will dispose itself according to Nature? Can the Ethiope change or alter his skin, or the leopard his hue? . . . But why go I about to praise Nature, the which as yet was never any Imp so wicked & barbarous, any Turk so vile and brutish . . . that could, or would , or durst dispraise or contemn? (39)

As Judith Dundas points out, Euphues' argument in this passage serves as a classic example of an abuse of wit, since Euphues goes on to deftly cite Cicero and Aristotle in order to defend his own conception of nature. But the content of his argument does not merely serve to demonstrate how classical reference can be manipulated; it also works to associate the action of abusing rhetoric with the racialized "other." In a matter of a few lines, Euphues has referenced one marker of racial identity, "hue" or skin complexion, and two markers of national identity, the "Aethiope" and the "Turke," both exoticized foreigners to an English audience. The first of these examples paraphrases Jeremiah 13:23 and anticipates Aaron's argument in *Titus Andronicus* that black "scorns to bear another hue" (4.2.100). But unlike Aaron, Euphues is "blackened" not "by nature," but through his manipulative acts, through his use of sophistry. This is an inversion of the stereotypical racialized discourse: Euphues does not engage in disreputable acts because he is a racialized other; he is rather a racialized other because of the way he uses wit.

Similarly, when Euphues plays the "Machiavel" by courting Lucilla secretly, an action that betrays Philautus, he creates a situation where, as the narrator earlier foretold, "wit wresteth [men] to vice, so it forgeth them some feat excuse to cloake their vanity" (43). Later, Euphues is linked even more directly to a racialized discourse when he is labeled by both Philautus and Don Ferardo as an "untrustworthy Greek" for his subversive courting. After Philautus discovers his friend's deceit he laments, "O counterfeit companion couldest thou under the show of a steadfast friend cloake the malice of a mortal foe? Is this the courtesy of Athens, the caviling of scholars, the craft of Grecians?" (76). Philautus continues on a diatribe in this fashion about the untrustworthiness of the Greeks referencing Ulysses and Sinon as other examples. It is important to note that, up until Euphues presents his manipulative arguments and engages in deceit, his status as a foreigner is never emphasized. Indeed, in the opening passages, it is Italy that is portrayed as corrupt, as Eubulus warns Euphues not to allow the city of Naples to lead him to vice. Yet when Euphues demonstrates corruption, others accuse this behavior of being directly related to his inherent nature, just as he formerly argued to Eubulus that one's moral character is directly associated with one's natural predisposition.

Of course, it is not unusual in the sixteenth century for vice to be associated with racial or national identity, so it is not that surprising that Euphues' use of wit is portrayed likewise, since English culture of the period demonstrates itself to be markedly xenophobic. Neither is there anything particularly unique about the prodigal narrative that *Euphues* presents. As Helgerson has documented, "story after story" in the period feature narratives where youths are admonished by an elder and eventually recant. Helgerson concludes, "Not the parable of the prodigal Son, with its benign vision of

paternal forgiveness, but rather the paradigm of prodigal rebellion interested the Elizabethans" (*The Elizabethan Prodigals* 3). However, I want to point to something much more specific here: how the racial and national politics in *Euphues* relate directly to the text's attempt to market itself to the potential reader. Lyly's text has moved away from the nearly universally positive portrayal of wit by the early humanists and demonstrates the way wit can lead to vice. However, it does not outright reject wit as a completely negative attribute. By blackening Euphues both figuratively and literally, Lyly's text removes some of the pressure from the implications that wit itself is innately corrosive. This move is necessary for a text that attempts and succeeds in capitalizing on the popularity of rhetorically adept (i.e., "witty") discourse, but at the same time is ambivalent towards the traditional humanist's conception of wit and its associations with virtue.

Nevertheless, despite the distinctions between the Euphues novels' portrayal of wit and what came before them, some endorsements of the traditional humanist ideals remain, especially when it comes to championing the value of knowledge over material wealth. Because of these reinforcements, the central theme of Lyly's text has sometimes been portrayed as reinforcing the humanist agenda. Richard A. McCabe, for example, points out that the text opens with Eubulus's argument about the proper use of wit and ends with Euphues' application of his wit towards the pursuit of religious and philosophical truths, both moves that directly reflect the teachings of early humanist scholars. He describes the text as a journey that demonstrates the process by which "Eloquent wit returns to the service of wisdom," thus assuring the "humanist ideal has been achieved" (324). In McCabe's traditional reading and application of the humanist

narrative, the pursuit of the individual's economic benefit or his concerns about material possessions are placed in opposition to the ideal pursuit of truth and wisdom. Similarly, Judith Rice Henderson argues that Euphues' narrative bears a striking resemblance to Erasmus's *Opus de Conscribendis Epistolis*:

The prodigal son motif, which has been recognized in *The Anatomy of Wyt*, appears in Erasmus' story too, and in both the prodigal is advised by a wise elder, although in Erasmus "a certain paternal friend" advises Lucius after he has sinned, while in Lyly Eubulus warns Euphues before he falls into vice. . . . In both stories the prodigal's reform turns to letter writing to persuade his friend to follow him in the path of virtue and learning. Both Erasmus and Lyly point the humanist moral that "good literature" teaches "good living." (13)

By the end of the narrative, Euphues does indeed become the embodiment of the humanist conception of virtue as referenced by McCabe and Henderson. However, the text's presentation of wit and the path by which Euphues reaches his destination undercuts a number of traditional humanist assumptions.

The fact that Euphues receives the wise advice before his folly but still rejects it is a key difference from Erasmus's text. In *Euphues*, the advice does not serve any kind of corrective function; its corrective function is rendered impotent. This pattern of setting up humanist motifs only to deviate from them occurs throughout the narrative. For example, at the very beginning of the narrative Euphues is described as having "more wit then wealth, and yet of more wealth then wisdome" (32). Lyly clearly signals that this order should be reversed, and the statement functions as a reinforcement of the humanist

value system in the way McCabe and Henderson are suggesting. However, shortly thereafter the narrator goes on to condemn Euphues by stating, "It is a greater show of a pregnant wit than perfect wisdom in a thing of sufficient excellency to use superfluous eloquence" (33). In other words, Lyly is arguing that eloquent rhetoric indicates wit, not wisdom, and that worthwhile concepts should have the "excellency" to stand on their own without the need for such embellishments. The contrast Lyly is setting up in this passage between the potential ("pregnant wit") and the actualization ("perfect wisdom") has not only severed the traditional humanist link between education and the acquisition of civic virtue, but it has positioned them as rhetorical opposites.

In Lyly's sequel, *Euphues and His England* (1580), the ties to humanist pedagogy seemed to have weakened even more. The original *Euphues* novel (1578) ultimately offers a caustic rejection of life at court and of the witty language of courtship, culminating in Euphues' "Cooling Card to Philautus," a letter which encourages his former friend to completely reject courtship and the pursuit of love, since it only leads to misery. Even if the text does not serve as a perfect facilitator of the humanist educational agenda for the reasons indicated above, *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit* ultimately still promotes the rejection of a life in court and champions a dedication to a life of scholarship. However, *Euphues and His England* overtly caters to the court audience from the start and never makes any clear condemnation of courtly life. In an introductory preface addressed to "the Ladies and Gentlewomen of England," the narrator goes so far as to suggest that gentlewomen should read the book with a dog in their laps so that "when you shall be weary in reading of the one you may be ready to sport with the other" (161). He even goes so far as to proclaim that "Euphues had rather lie shut in a ladies

casket than open in a scholar's study" (162). This statement creates a sharp break with the Euphues at the end of the first novel, who renounced life at court and had devoted himself to a life of scholarship.

Half way through *Euphues and his England* an even more dramatic break occurs from the first novel. After arriving in England, Euphues explicitly recants his conclusions at the end of *Anatomy*:

I will confess in two things my extreme folly: the one in loving Lucilla, who in comparison of these [English women] had no spark of beauty, the other for making a "Cooling Card" against women, when I see these to have so much virtue; so that in the first I must acknowledge my judgement raw to discern shadows, and rash in the latter to give so peremptory sentence. In both I think myself to have erred so much that I recant both, being ready to take any penance thou shalt enjoy me, whether it be a faggot for heresy or a fine for hypocrisy. (234-235)

Philautus is taken aback by Euphues' announcement and proclaims that he now sees that "there is nothing more fair than snow, yet nothing less firm; nothing more fine than wit, yet nothing more fickle" (236). This recanting of Euphues' early position is the cause of the central conflict between Euphues and Philautus in the narrative, yet it is important to note that, unlike in *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit*, neither character is taking up a defense of Euphues' earlier position. Philautus only rejects Euphues' praise of English women because for once he wants to claim the moral high ground. In fact, while he rebukes Euphues for his newly found favoritism towards courtship, Philautus himself is secretly in love with Camilla and tries to court her through the majority of the novel. The end of

the novel even puts the life of the scholar and the life of the courtier directly in parallel. It does not position one as better than the other, but instead merely indicates that it would be "a hard question among ladies whether Philautus were a better wooer or a husband, whether Euphues were a better lover or a scholar" (354).

On one hand, the shift away from a criticism of court life in *Euphues and His England* indicates a savvy awareness on Lyly's part of the audience his first text found in the court and among admirers of courtly romances. However, this shift can also be viewed as a demonstration of the general shift in the narrative of humanism, as G. K. Hunter argues:

Certainly the history of English Humanism can be seen as an exercise in the myth of the political effectiveness of learning: we see Wolsey, Cromwell, Henry, Edward and the young Elizabeth, each for a different purpose, requiring the Humanists to use their talents in the preparation of policy statements and the persuasion of other countries. It is only by the middle of Elizabeth's reign that government becomes sure enough of itself to dispense with their sometimes embarrassing services; by this time, however, the myth of state-service as the natural end of a training in the humanities is so well established that the up-and-coming literati cannot escape from it: it controls the outlook and attitudes of a man like John Lyly. . . . (15)

The siren call of courtly service has a strong attraction for the humanist scholar, perhaps even more so for a writer in Lyly's position. Lyly was denied the educational chair he sought at Oxford and eventually his aspirations turned toward a position at court as

Master of Revels, and many of Lyly's later plays feature overtly flattering allegorical portrayals of Elizabeth. When *Euphues and his England* attempts to erase the stark contrast between the life of the courtier and the life of the scholar, this shift could be viewed as Lyly's first attempt to lobby for such a position. That Lyly's sequel overtly avoids castigating court life like its predecessor and instead somewhat celebrates courtly displays of wit seems evidence to this end. This argument is further supported by the fact that the text ends with a Latin poem titled "Iovis Elizabeth," which Scragg describes as "Elizabethan panegyric" (356). Thus, ironically, *Euphues and His England's* recantation of the earlier text's rejection of courtly life may be read as Lyly's own attempt to follow in the footsteps of his humanist progenitors in seeking a position at court. But, ironically, in his move to pander to the court and gain a position in state service, Lyly ultimately further disassociated the concept of wit from its humanist connotations. One could argue, as Hunter does, that "Euphues did not betray the tradition that began with the *Utopia*; but it revealed what had happened to it" (35). Nevertheless, Lyly ultimately reverses the prodigal narrative motif of his first novel and likewise reverses its attitude towards courtly displays of wit.

If we turn to an examination of the ends to which Lyly employs the concept of wit he inherited from the early humanists, we can see that Lyly's application of it amounts to "A Fit of Rhyme Against Rhyme." Helgerson concludes, "Far from renewing the humanist tradition through his borrowing from it, Lyly reveals the poverty to which it had been reduced. Reproving and renouncing, abstaining and refraining are all that Euphues' sources can show him in the way of virtue" (*Elizabethan Prodigals* 65). But perhaps equally significant to this general shift is the means by which Lyly's texts accomplishes it

through their presentation of wit. Though Helgerson's characterization of Lyly's texts make it seem as though they are passive inheritors of a cultural disenfranchisement, this characterization is somewhat retroactive. Lyly's *Euphues* are some of the earliest to portray wit in a negative fashion. Moreover, they are largely responsible for beginning the process of deconstructing the triangulated relationship between the humanist conception of wit, eloquent speech, and civic virtue. While the *Euphues* novels may reveal a "poverty" in the state of the humanist tradition as Helgerson argues, they are far from impoverishing the concept of wit. In fact, Lyly's texts offered the term new, more secularized connotations that contests the divine wit championed by the early humanists. This move is one that paves the way for both future criticisms and commoditization of wit in the English literary marketplace.

CHAPTER IV

THOMAS NASHE'S BARGAINING WIT

Introduction

Thomas Nashe's texts must have afforded some catharsis to impoverished London academics. While Nashe's biographer, Charles Nicholl, wryly and romantically refers to the outskirts of London where Nashe lived as "the Bohemian haunt" and "liberty alleys that lodged the likes of Greene, Marlowe, Watson, Shakespeare and Tarlton" (40-41), this real estate was surely at a comical distance from the veritable gated community of the poet-scholar contracted by the likes of George Putnam and Phillip Sidney. Nashe's sardonic references to the region's bars and brothels and his frequent use of gallows humor to describe the impoverished life of the London scholar-poet make it clear that he knew the residents well. He offered them wry observations on daily life that were presented, as George Crabbe would succinctly put it nearly a hundred years later, "[a]s truth would paint it and bards would not" (54). Because of Nashe's wry depictions of the socio-economic conditions of the late sixteenth-century London writers, his work is often described as proto-journalism nearly as frequently as it is associated with traditional fiction.¹ As Lorna Hutson explains,

Nashe seems always to be engaged in writing his life and opinions in an exceptionally intimate, physical manner. His published writings are always in the first person, an "I" who is so disarmingly frank about the

¹ For example, Edwin Miller refers to Nashe as "among the first journalists in an age which had not yet invented the newspaper" (205). Charles Nicholl similarly portrays Nashe as "a journalist who predated journalism" (2). J. B. Steane hypothesizes that an encyclopedia entry on Nashe might describe him as "[t]he most lively of Elizabethan journalists" (13). John Stafford positions him as "a journalist appealing to the people for patronage" (84).

ongoing processes and hazards of writing that the act of composition itself becomes vividly present behind the printed words. (1)

Hutson is referring to the way Nashe's work often has a doubling effect; his authors are speaking inside a fictional frame, but also serve as commentary on Nashe's experiences as a professional writer in late sixteenth-century England. To some extent, fiction always betrays the underlying conditions of its productions, but Nashe's narrators foreground these conditions so heavily that our understanding of them as "fictional" is constantly destabilized. For example, it becomes difficult to avoid reading two voices in one when Nashe writes in his preface to *Pierce Pennilesse*, "I am grown at length to see into the vanity of the world more than ever I did, and now I condemn myself for nothing so much as playing the dolt in print" and then a few pages later has Pierce, his purportedly fictional protagonist, complain, "Having spent many years in studying how to live, and lived a long time without money, having tired my youth with folly and surfeited my mind with vanity, I began at length to look back to repentance and address my endeavors to prosperity" (51-52).

But if Nashe's literary framework makes it difficult to determine where biography begins and fiction ends, the critiques of purported social injustices in these texts often involve a cultural framing of their own, one that further complicates the relationship between fiction and social commentary. His arguments work to establish stark battle lines between "true wits," university educated men carrying the torch for the literary values of earlier humanist writers such as Roger Ascham and Philip Sidney, and those lacking wit, marketplace hacks and undiscerning consumers who in some fashion betray the humanist vision of literature. The criteria by which he distinguishes these two groups

often seem circular and sometimes even arbitrary. In one text he joyously engages in "inuetive against our abject abbreviations of Arts" and laments the "pride of contraction in every man's action," acts that Nashe sees as betrayals of university culture (*Preface to Greene's Menaphon* 318); in the next he "would wish them to learne to speake many things in few" (*Anatomy of Absurdity* 45). He praises classical works but frequently attacks English writers translating these works and emulating their style and content as contributing nothing original. Some of the contradictions in his arguments can be ascribed to ambiguities in the concept of "eloquent" rhetoric inherited from the early humanists, but Nashe's arguments rarely allow for the acknowledgement of such ambiguities: men are either true scholars or they are frauds; the texts they produce either affirm the humanist tradition or betray it. From Nashe's perspective, there was a clear culture war brewing, and you were either with the poet-scholar or you were against him. To this end, he frequently positions his authorial personae² as university educated men caught between two forces: the tastes of a purportedly under-educated audience that does not comprehend or value wit and the lofty literary ideals of the early humanists that marketplace purportedly does not support.

Before exploring in more detail Nashe's narrative frames and his own framing of issues related to the professional writer, I want briefly to contextualize Nashe's position in the literary marketplace. Despite his frequent complaints about the plight of the professional writer, Nashe was living during a period of tremendous growth in terms of both the amount of literature produced and of literature consumed. In *On Demand*, David

² By "authorial personae" I intend both the fictional narrators in works such as *Pierce Penniless* and *The Unfortunate Traveler* and the first person commentators, assumed to be Nashe himself, in works that do not entail an overtly stated fictional frame, such as *Anatomy of Absurdity*, *Strange News*, and other pamphlets. Both types of texts function similarly in terms of the way they frame the Nashe's discussion of wit and his attempts to position himself in the marketplace.

J. Baker outlines the massive increase in literary productions that occurred near the end of the sixteenth century. Baker points out that over fifty million people attended plays in London between the 1560s and 1642 and that, based upon contemporary publishing records kept by the *Short Title Catalogue*, three times as many books were being published in 1600 than were being published seventy years earlier (6-7).

As discussed in the previous chapter, John Lyly's *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit* (1579) contributed significantly to this trend. It was published during a period of significant increase in university attendance and matriculation and catered directly to the tastes of a university-educated audience.³ It produced a fad in consumer culture, as is demonstrated by the tremendous number of books for decades afterward that tried literally to capitalize on its popularity, both through titular reference and through imitation of its prose style. Even Nashe was accused of copying Lyly nearly a decade and half after *Euphues'* publication, a charge to which he defensively replied, "*Euphues* I readd when I was a little ape in Cambridge, and then I thought it was *Ipse ille* . . . but to imitate it I abhor. . . ." (*Strange News* 319). By the time Nashe was writing in the late 1580s, Lyly's popularity was already rapidly diminishing, but the literary market that developed in *Euphues'* cultural district was well established and widely patronized. As Baker explains, this burgeoning market attracted considerable antagonism:

. . . the rising demand that propelled this "revolution" (and was propelled by it) was opening up markets for literary consumable: goods (books) and services (performances). Entrepreneurs were at work to meet this demand, though without much collusion and usually in open competition. Their profit margins attracted attention, and not least from competitors in other,

³ For more on the growth in university attendance in the period, see Chapter III, pages 53-55.

related industries, who liked the quickening of trade, but wished more of this income was coming their way. Growing literary markets attracted the attention of moralists and social critics too. . . . They saw money accruing to disreputable theater companies and to scribbling poets, and to them all this getting and spending looked like a carnival of deception and corruption. They objected, condemning play going and other such indulgences as consumer fraud perpetrated on a grand scale. (33)

To support his claim that growth in the book trade led to significant backlash, Baker parenthetically references a passage from *Pierce Pennilesse* (1592) wherein Nashe refutes claims that the theater takes money away from other enterprises. In it, the eponymous *Pierce* argues that those who visit local alehouses and restaurants often attend the theater afterward and that these establishments were in symbiotic rather than competitive relationship with the theater:

But what shall he do that hath spent himself? Where shall he haunt? Faith, when dice, lust, and drunkenness and all have dealt upon him, if there be never a play for him to go to for his penny, he sits melancholy in his chamber, devising upon felony or treason, and how he may best exalt himself by mischief. (115)

This argument is a brilliant piece of cultural politicking that gracefully navigates the territorial concerns of the various groups that Baker is referencing. The early humanists frequently associated consumption itself with vice.⁴ Thus Nashe is somewhat caught

⁴ For example, as discussed in Chapter II, Ascham argues in *The Scholemaster* (1570) that one of the largest causes of the ruin of "good wittes" is due to the court's purported obsession with the newest fashion and ostentatious displays. Ascham's description of ostentatious linguistic display leads directly into an

between two criticisms in his attempt to defend the theatre: the criticism on the humanist side that consumption itself is a vice and the criticism by those in the marketplace that the theatre takes away from their business. In attempting to answer the critique of one of these groups, he seemingly makes his argument vulnerable to the opposite side. However, Nashe finds a way to evade the trap by presenting theatre attendance as the buffer between consumption and vice, one that prevents the former from resulting in the later.

This savvy piece of argumentation, however, should not be mistaken for betraying Nashe's overall attitude towards the growing literary marketplace. In fact, in many ways it stands in direct contradiction to stark contrasts he attempts to draw elsewhere between the scholar-poet and the marketplace hack. Moreover, Nashe's texts often evidence huge shifts in his own writing between catering to a popular audience one moment and castigating them the next, shifts that betray his own unstable position in the marketplace. The nuances of these various stances coupled with the unstable evolutions in Nashe's own writing style can sometimes render attempts to untangle his rhetorical positions maddening. The dilemma, I would posit, is partially responsible for C. S. Lewis's famous conclusion that "if asked what Nashe 'says,' we should have to say, 'Nothing'" (416).

In *Self-Crowned Laureates*, Richard Helgerson developed a system for categorizing Renaissance writers' relationships to their audience, a system that is useful for further exploring Nashe's own role in the marketplace. Helgerson sketches three authorial positions: the professional, the amateur, and the laureate. He defines professionals as the group of writers who came into existence as a result of the aforementioned expansion of the literary market and who simply "depended on writing

attack upon clothing fashion in a way that is typical of early humanist critique of the marketplace. For more on this topic, see Chapter II, pages 41-43.

for a livelihood" (22). Helgerson dismisses professional writers as being unconcerned with fashioning an authorial identity, noting that they often published their works anonymously or focused on playwriting and that they did not emphasize the cultural value of their work. These are the types of writers other critics have traditionally referred to as "hack" writers.

In contrast to the *professional*, Helgerson positions the class of *amateur* as primarily gentry class men—or those with genteel aspirations—who produced literature merely as a hobby. While recognizing that amateurs were highly influenced by the rhetoric of the early humanists, Helgerson argues that they did not view literary enterprise as allowing for a true fulfillment of civic duty. Instead, they wrote for pleasure, pursued careers in church, law, or government, and associated the act of writing with a sort of prodigal waywardness (*Self-Crowned Laureates* 29). Helgerson notes a common trait between the professional and the amateur in terms of their attitude towards publishing their work:

The similarity between them is reflected in a trait we have already noticed, their common reluctance, whether feigned or true, to have their work printed. . . Their reasons no doubt differed—the amateur feared loss of face, the professional loss of income—but they resembled one another in lacking a desire to give permanent form and wide, printed circulation to the products of their wit. (*Self-Crowned Laureates* 37)

In using the phrase "products of their wit," Helgerson is invoking the traditional humanist use of the term, of employing wit for the good of the commonwealth. But the key to his description comes not in the term's usage, but in its application to the marketplace.

Helgerson is not positing that these writers rejected the value of wit, but rather that they rejected the value of wit as manifested in the newly emerged marketplace of print.

The third and final category presented by Helgerson, the *laureate*, is a writer who largely defines himself in contradistinction to the two aforementioned roles. Helgerson romanticizes laureates as literally Socratic figures, intellectual visionaries who consider themselves prophets of truth. He argues that "[t]o join the laureate's fit audience, to be sealed of his tribe, requires a constantly renewed act of faith in the inspiration, goodness, and self-knowledge of the laureate himself. . . ." (*Self-Crowned Laureates* 47). The professional and the amateur are individuals who have little stake in the literary agenda of the humanist enterprise as it relates to their own careers or the late sixteenth-century marketplace. Contrarily, laureates strove to create literature that could rise to the challenge of facilitating civic virtue in the same manner the classical texts championed by Elyot, Ascham, and Sidney purportedly did.

While Helgerson's categorizations are highly insightful for understanding the authors and works he associates with "the laureate"—the self-fashioned bombast of Jonson, the pious poetry of Milton—they become immediately problematic when applied to Nashe in ways that point to the unique space and unstable position he occupies in the marketplace. Helgerson categorizes Nashe as an "amateur," and then only in passing (*Self-Crowned Laureates* 36), but Nashe shares few of the characteristics that Helgerson identifies for that group. First, as Lorna Hutson points out, Nashe does not write from the position of the prodigal; his texts neither begin nor end with the traditional apologetic framework Helgerson so strongly associates with the amateur (9-10). Second, while Nashe may not have emphasized the importance of his own work, it would be a mistake

to associate him with a group that dismissed or downplayed the humanist conception of literary value, since most of his texts make the relationship between literary value and marketplace value a point of central concern. Third, Nashe's texts betray the clear markings of a writer who is engaged in the process of self-fashioning an authorial identity, a trait Helgerson argues belongs only to the laureate. Fourth, unlike both the amateur and the laureate, Nashe was clearly writing to make a living and betrays a willingness to make compromises to that end. In short, Nashe does not fit neatly into the role of either the professional writer, or the amateur, or the laureate.

To remedy some of the problems in Helgerson's categorization, Laurie Ellinghausen attempts to identify a group that she refers to as the "laboring authors," who seize "not civic status, but underdog status" (7). She positions Nashe among this group and argues that the laboring authors are economically and socially located at the "crossroads" between different class based cultures (12). Ellinghausen characterizes the writing of this group as attempting to strike a balance in their work between their economic needs and their larger ambitions to answer to the humanist call to civic duty. As such, she argues, their social position comes to define a key characteristic of their writing, since it "becomes a rhetorical pose from which to argue for the virtue of one's own authorial labor as distinct from amateur and professional modes of composition" (7). Ellinghausen's socio-economic framing of the laboring writers goes a long way in establishing the parameters of a writer that occupied a unique middle ground between Helgerson's professional and laureate, a position that Nashe undoubtedly occupies.

However, Ellinghausen has at the same time further fragmented the group of authors associated with the humanist enterprise in a way that Nashe and many of his

contemporaries would have likely found perplexing. Nashe saw the group Helgerson and Ellinghausen label as "amateurs" as direct descendants of the early humanists and all part of the same continuum. It is not uncommon, for example, for Nashe to reference Ascham in one sentence and Sidney shortly thereafter, as if he perceived the former to be handing off the literary baton to the latter. In Nashe's framing of them, the early humanists and the group Helgerson and Ellinghausen label as "amateurs" and "prodigals" were both positioned on the side of the scholar-poet. While it may be true that "amateur" writers like Sidney saw themselves as prodigals when they engaged in fiction writing, it does not follow that their admirers saw them that way, as Nashe's praise of writers like Sidney, Lyly, and Gascoigne attests. Similarly, Ellinghausen claims that the laboring writers "speak to the interests of smaller, more marginal populations that often get lost within the broad notions of 'society' or 'nation'" (12). But although, as Ellinghausen points out, Nashe's text gave a sense of community to disenfranchised university men, his rhetoric clearly reveals that he sees the problem this group faces as indicative of a deterioration of intellectual culture as a whole and not merely the problems of a small group within a larger society. In fact, as I will demonstrate later in this essay, Nashe's texts are often heavily invested in the very opposite project—in appropriating the texts of various authors and uniting them under the common banner of the humanist conception of wit.

Thus we are left with two difficulties. First, Nashe's texts do not provide a stable and persistent attitude towards the marketplace. Second, Nashe holds a unique position within that marketplace that makes it difficult to position him within the categorical framework of sixteenth-century writers offered by literary critics such as Helgerson and Ellinghausen. In an attempt to solve these problems, I propose that the first three stages

of the Kübler-Ross model of grief—denial, anger, and bargaining—provide a useful heuristic device for understanding and discussing the general range of attitudes displayed in Nashe's texts and for identifying the authorial position he occupies.⁵ Without going so far as to claim melodramatically that Nashe was literally "grieving" over the death of the humanist literary ideal, I will posit that the range of attitudes presented in Nashe's texts demonstrate a struggle to come to terms with marketplace realities in the late sixteenth century.

Early in his career, in the preface to Greene's *Menaphon* and *Anatomy of Abuses*, Nashe positions himself and his discussion of literature in ways that often reflect early humanist attitudes towards the concept of wit. Scholars are those with wit while marketplace hacks are those who lack wit or abuse it. Even in these earlier texts, denial of the marketplace system of value and anger towards it are already common motifs. These attitudes later become embodied in a fully developed persona in the form of the titular character of *Pierce Pennilesse*. In *Pierce*, Nashe works to construct, define, and further solidify the binaries of the scholar-poet and the marketplace hack. But in doing so, he is using *Pierce* to construct a space from within which to market himself and his own works, a move that betrays an economic and cultural interest in the marketplace. In later texts, Nashe's style and form of argumentation push further into this territory and start to more closely resemble a writer that is "bargaining" with this marketplace in overt ways, as is demonstrated most prominently in Nashe's published disputes with Gabriel Harvey. As a result of this bargaining, Nashe develops a different attitude towards marketplace conceptions of wit and self-fashions his own writing in a way that meets popular

⁵ Kübler-Ross does not present these stages as unidirectional and even puts the word *stages* in quotation marks to emphasize this point. Like Kulber-Ross, I am using the concept of these "stages" as a heuristic. For more on these three stages, see Kübler-Ross, *On Death and Dying* 51-96.

demands in an increasingly more direct fashion. However, these attitudinal shifts are not always unidirectional. Aspects of Nashe's negotiations and bargaining tactics are already demonstrably well underway in his early texts, and in later texts he sometimes relapses to earlier, more defensive and culturally conservative literary attacks upon the marketplace. Nevertheless, in all of the aforementioned texts Nashe is engaged in the process of coming to terms with the very system of literary binaries he has himself helped to construct, and the concept of wit remains central to his attempt to bargain for cultural and economic capital.

Beggarly Wit

Before discussing the attitudinal shifts in the relationship between wit and the marketplace in Nashe's work, I want to give a general overview of Nashe's conception of wit as it relates to his humanist progenitors. One of Nashe's favorite targets is the supposedly anti-intellectual, ignorant culture that surrounds him, and he frequently associates this culture with a lack of wit. Much of Nashe's invective is targeted specifically at this group, perhaps more than any other. "I hate in thy name to speak coldly to a quick-witted generation," he writes in the opening of *Christ's Tears Over Jerusalem* (10), a statement alluding to the distinction made by Ascham between *hard wits* (studious pupils) and *quick wits* (undereducated opportunists). Similarly, after listening to German academics debate theology, Jack Wilton, the protagonist of *The Unfortunate Traveler*, attempts to outsource the origins of wit's abuse to the Germans: "Gross plodders they were all, that had some learning and reading, but no wit to make use of it. . . . The leaden-headed Germans first began this, and we English-men have surfeited of their absurd imitation" (296). Sometimes these characterizations result in generalize

apothegms lamenting the state of the culture as a whole as when Summer remarks at the opening of *Summer's Last Will and Testament*, "Oh, vanity, itself, Oh, wit, ill spent!" Statements such as these pervade Nashe's texts, as do phrases such as "beggarly wit," "impoverished wit," and "idle wit."

Nashe sometimes uses this sort of terminology simply to indicate a lack of intelligence. For example, when Pierce complains about a man who bought a piece of rope because the antiquary claimed it was the same length and width as Christ's tomb, he describes him as having "a very rusty wit" (80). However, more often than not, Nashe's usage implies that an abuse or lack of wit indicates a lack of knowledge of the traditional humanist curriculum or its proper application. Indeed, his text frequently renders the literary marketplace a space of postlapsarian witlessness, a complaint that often dovetails into a critique of writing for economic motive. A passage from *Pierce Pennilesse* wherein he berates the "dishlickers of learning" serves as a good example:

Alas, poor Latinless authors, they are so simple they know not what they do. They no sooner spy a new ballad, and his name to it that compiled it, but they put him in for one of the learned men of our time. I marvel how the masterless men that that set up their bills in Paul's for services, and such as paste up their papers on every post for arithmetic and writing schools, scape eternity amongst them. I believe both they and the Knight Marshal's men that nail up mandates at the Court gate for annoying the palace with filth or making water, if they set their names to writing, will shortly make up the number of learned men of our time, and be as famous as the rest. (92)

While this particular passage does not reference wit overtly, it depicts the cultural landscape that Nashe sees as witless, a culture full of "Latinless" authors who betray an ignorance of the humanist curriculum and thus lack the wit necessary to distinguish good literature from bad. Nashe is of course joking when he argues that seeing someone's name printed—even if it is merely in an ad for wanted work or as an "author" of a list detailing crude criminal acts—will be considered reason enough to consider that person a learned genius. But despite Nashe's satirical intent, his statement still illustrates the tensions between the general concept of public notoriety and Nashe's concept of a true scholar.

What Nashe is deriding is the idea that marketplace fame can be a new determinant of social and economic status, a concept that was only just emerging in the early modern period. Elsewhere in *Pierce* Nashe is even more overt in making the association. In describing his "idle witted adversaries," he protests, "Should we (as you) borrow out all others, and gather nothing of ourselves, our names should be baffled on every bookseller's stall, and not a chandler's mustard-pot but would wipe his mouth with our waste paper" (90). Thus, popular writers are immediately associated with literal consumption and waste and with contributing nothing to the humanistic enterprise, but rather with engaging in the parasitic recycling of other writers' material.

This accusation that many modern writers are unjustly capitalizing on classical writers' wit is a charge that Nashe frequently employs. In a passage from his preface to Greene's *Menaphon*—a passage born out of a well-worn inherited nostalgia—he complains,

Indeed I must needs say, the descending yeares from the Philosophers *Athens* haue not been supplied with such present Orators, as were able in any English veine to be eloquent of their owne, but either they must borrow inuention of *Ariosto* his cuntrymen take up choice of words by exchange in Tully's *Tusculans* & the Latin historiographers' storehouses (similitudes, nay, whole sheets & tractates verbatim from the plenty of Plutarch and Pliny), and, to conclude, their whole method of writing from the liberty of comical fictions that have succeeded to our rhetoricians by a second imitation, so that well may the adage *Nil dictum quod non dictum prius*⁶ be the most judicial estimate of our latter writers. (313)

Thus he paints the culture of modern England as a wasteland where no originality and no wit exists except that which has been borrowed from ancient Greek and Roman texts. It is worth noting that Nashe wrote this screed of a mossback at the ripe old age of twenty-two. This fact at least partially explains Richard Harvey's scathing attack upon Nashe as "a factious head, a contentious wit, a seditious commotioner, a most insolent libeller, in brief, one of the most pernicious and intollerable writers that I have ever read" (see McKerrow 5:177).⁷ From the very beginning of his writing career, Nashe engaged in a full-on assault on the literary marketplace, one that was not always welcomed.

When developing these sorts of arguments into fuller cultural critiques, Nashe typically borrows the humanist rhetoric of promoting literature as both indicator and facilitator of wit, learning, and virtue—humanism's holy trinity. However, whereas

⁶ This phrase translates to "nothing has been said that has not been said before."

⁷ This exchange is purportedly the beginnings of the famous Nashe-Harvey feud. For a fuller account, see McKerrow 5:76-78. As McKerrow notes, "it is difficult to understand why [the writers Richard Harvey criticized] should have waited so long to answer Harvey's attack . . . [but] it is possible that there were intermediate links in the quarrel, of which we know nothing" (77).

earlier writers' condemnation of certain texts as unfit for study were largely based on the ways in which these works were either rhetorically unsophisticated or failed to promote virtuous behavior, Nashe frequently positions the popular writing of the period and the corrupt nature of the literary marketplace at the forefront of his commentary and positions the writers participating in this marketplace as witless or abusers of wit, as the aforementioned examples demonstrate.

Bargaining Wit

Now that the general way that Nashe employs the humanists' conception of wit has been established, we can begin to explore with more specificity the way his usage of it in various texts relates to the attitudinal positions he takes towards the literary market. Nashe's first published text was *The Anatomy of Absurdity* (1589), an argumentative essay that purports to inventory the vices that plague contemporary England. The work's title intentionally plays off of Lyly's popular *Euphues: Anatomy of Wit*. The full title page is worth noting:

The Anatomie of Absurditie: Contayning a breefe confutation of the slender imputed praises to feminine perfection, with a short description of the seuerall practices of youth, and sundry follies of our licentious times. No lesse pleaseant to be read, than profitable to be remembered, especially of those, who liue more licentiously or addicted to a more nyce stoycall austerities. Compiled by T. Nashe.

First, the phrase "no lesse pleaseant to be read, than profitable to be remembered" is a euphuism that attempts to capitalize on a similar phrase in the full title of Lyly's *Euphues*,

"verie pleasant for all Gentleman to read and most necessary to remember."⁸ Second, the various categories denoted as "absurdities" in this list seem almost random in their presentation; a confutation of the praise of women, a description of youth's vices, and "sundry follies" comprise a table of contents that inspires no confidence in a presentation of a coherent argumentative thread. Indeed, an initial reading leads one to believe that the text is little more than a random cataloguing of various vices, a bricolage of cultural complaints for a quick publication. However a closer look at the context in which each of these topics is discussed in the text reveals a single thread that binds the book and connects all these various discussions: criticism of popular texts in the literary marketplace and an attempt to deny their cultural and economic value.

The Anatomy of Absurdity opens by condemning "these brainlesse Bussards" who are in "every quarter bigge wyth one Pamphlet or other" (9). Nashe goes on to compare these authors and their printed works to spoiled eggs that rise to the surface when placed in water:

But as an Egge that is full being put into water sinketh to the bottome, wheres that which is emptie floateth a-boue, so those that are more exquisitely furnished with learning shroude themselves in obscurity, whereas they that are voide of all knowledge, endeuour continually to publish theyr follie. (10)

⁸ While in other places the word "profitable" may contain ambiguity or even slippage between being used as an economic referent and as a referent for moral improvement, this particular passage from Nashe seems to be referring exclusively to the latter as it falls in line with the humanist usage implicating "profitable reading" discussed by writers such as Thomas Elyot and Roger Ascham. For example, in *The Scholemaster*, Roger Ascham writes, "For this ye shall finde most true by experience, that amongst a number quicke wittes in youthe, fewe be found, in the end, either verie fortunate for them selues, or verie profitable to serue the common wealth . . ." (190). Throughout the entirety of *The Scholemaster*, Ascham promotes books that will be "profitable" in promoting civic virtue and will in turn shape students in to individuals who will benefit the commonwealth.

The water, in this comparison, is the literary marketplace and the texts that have the highest degree of popularity are the rotten eggs, which rise to the surface. Nashe's description of the learned writers who "shroude themselves in obscurity" is, of course, a reference to the stigma of print, one not entirely different from Lyly's reference in the preface to *Anatomy of Wit*, where he compares those who would publish in order to gain fame to a fool who would go in public to be seen. The difference, however, is that Lyly, Sidney, and many others before presented the printing of their works as a veritable act of cultural slumming for which they needed to ask forgiveness (or at least to feign such an attitude), whereas Nashe's text contains no such apology. As I have already noted, Helgerson's remark that the act of presenting a book for public consumption was, for many of these earlier writers, an act antithetical to the supposedly more important and sophisticated types of discourse occurring at court or university, or even among a private coterie of gentry. However, despite this attitude, these writers rarely displayed open hostilities towards the marketplace in the way Nashe does in *The Anatomy of Absurdity*. Whereas the earlier writers attempted to position themselves as outside of and above the literary marketplace, Nashe's texts reveal the attitudes of an author who is more heavily invested in it, both economically and socially. Moreover, Nashe's argumentative framework attempts to recruit writers such as Lyly, Sidney, and Ascham into helping with his own attacks against this marketplace despite the fact that these writers are differently associated with it.

Meanwhile, as the bad egg metaphor further demonstrates, Nashe also works on the opposite end of the argument to associate the work of purported marketplace hacks with the antithesis of the humanist literary enterprise. Nashe views the authors most

frequently published as being responsible for obscuring more worthwhile and virtuous texts. *Anatomy of Absurdity* attacks them as "idle wits" and says, matter-of-factly, "the Presse should be farre better employed" (10). This statement suggests sympathy with printing as an institution, but elsewhere he refers to "the Presse the dunghille whether they carry all the muck of their mellancholicke imaginations" (20), along with "bable bookemungers endeuors" (11), "trifling texts, wonton wits" (19), pamphlets that are the "excrements of the Artes" (20), and "two pennie Catichismes" that are "presumptuously presse[d] into the the Presse" (21). Throughout these passages, Nashe vacillates between attacking texts as corrupting the Presse and metonymically attacking the Presse itself as an embodiment of this corruption. Nevertheless, all of these passages attempt to accomplish the same goal: devaluing texts that Nashe thinks have been overvalued in the literary marketplace.

Even Nashe's attack on women is framed in an attack upon a flood of books and pamphlets that he argues perpetually flatter women while ignoring their vices. He proclaims that he "must send such idle wits to shrift" and admonishes these writers and their texts for lacking a moral purpose: "Are they not ashamed in their prefixed posies, to adorne a pretence of profit mixt with pleasure, when as in their bookes there is scarce to be found one precept pertaining to vertue, but whole quires fraught with amorous discourses..." (10). He ends his misogynistic diatribe in similar fashion:

Well woorthy are the Essenians to be extolled for their wysedome, who abhorre the company of Women and detest the possession of gold and siluer, and they to be deemed as soothing flatterers, who spend so much

paper about the proposition of praise, sette apart from any apparance of probabilitie. (19)

Nashe's editor, McKerrow, notes that this description of the Essenians is borrowed from Brian Melbanke's euphuistic romance *Philotimus* (1583). The full passage from Melbanke is as follows: "Among all sorts of conceyted fellowes, I reverence the Essenians, as most content in pleasures, and contentent with trifles, for they abhor the company of women, and detest the possession of gold and siluer" (37). This comparison of Nashe with his source reveals once again how Nashe is appropriating other writers for the cause of the English literary marketplace. While Melbancke references the Essenians's dislike of women and money, he says nothing of their distaste for those who "spend so much paper" praising women. Indeed, Nashe's characterization of the Essenians as a sect that condemns English ballad makers and romance authors is outrightly anachronistic in a way that overtly betrays his agenda. The misogynic attack on women's virtue is merely collateral damage. Nashe's main objective is to discredit writers of popular romances, sonnets, and ballads.

Nashe has essentially taken the language that the earlier prodigal writers like Lyly and Sidney used to preface their own works and outsourced these descriptions to popular writers. For example, it is not Lyly and Sidney who are presented by Nashe as the prodigals, but the group he generically characterizes as marketplace hacks. They are "wanton wits" (19) who publish either "witless vanitie" or "witte follie" (27). In all cases, they are presented as having betrayed the humanist conception of wit. As Jennifer Richards notes, the preface to *Menaphon* simultaneously praises the early humanist accomplishments but also "laments the decline of [the humanist] project, its failure to

invigorate a national literature," and "offers a scathing attack on contemporaries who borrow too heavily from classical and Italian literatures" (657). The purpose of these attacks is of course largely self-serving. Nashe is employing these writers as foils for his own authorial personae.

Pierce Penniless His Supplication to the Divell (1592), perhaps Nashe's most famous work, demonstrates a similar critique of the literary market, but from a more personal perspective. The titular protagonist in *Pierce Penniless* is in many ways a thinly veiled caricature of Nashe himself, and the narrative once more largely exists to provide a vehicle for Nashe to voice many of his complaints about the plight of writers of "true" wit in the late sixteenth century. At the opening of the work, Pierce details all economic injustices that have led him to seek patronage from the devil. He complains that he is not able to make a decent living as a writer despite "how many base men, that wanted those parts which I had, enjoyed content at will and had wealth at command" (53). After much searching, he meets the Knight Post who claims to be the "Devil's man." Pierce then provides the Knight Post with his written "supplication" to the devil and the narrative shifts to the supplication itself, which the Knight Post begins to read out loud. The supplication is not really a supplication at all, but instead a long satirical account of the current economic conditions in England. After he finishes reading it, the Knight Post expresses the same type of bewilderment that the reader is perhaps feeling as well: "A supplication callst thou this? . . . It is the maddest supplication that ever I saw" (118). The narrative then shifts again to a series of questions and answers by which Pierce asks about the various features of hell. Finally, *Pierce* concludes with a direct address to the

reader that attempts to justify and rationalize the preceding texts and to convince other writers not to allow patrons to take advantage of them.

As with *Anatomy of Abuses*, the subject of wit lies at the center of much of Pierce's commentary. Early in the text, Pierce complains that he has been "in the prime of [his] best wit, laid open to poverty" (52). His frustration at the gap between his intellectual ability and economic reward leads him to write the following lines of verse:

Ah, worthless wit, to train me to this woe,
 Deceitful arts, that nourish discontent:
 I'll thrive the folly that bewitched me so;
 Vain thoughts, adieu, for now I will repent.
 And yet my wants persuade me to proceed,
 Since none takes pity of a scholar's need. (52)

While these lines are obviously filled with sarcasm, there is also a subtle ambivalence to them; they are both self-condemning and prosecutorial. Pierce is clearly angry at what he sees as a betrayal by the marketplace of the humanist value system. While he may not honestly believe that his wit is "worthless" and that poetry is good for nothing but breeding "discontent," the fact that the pride and value he invests in his trade is not reflected in the value the marketplace puts on it forces him into a self-destructive downward spiral. Pierce berates himself for pursuing the writer's trade even as he further commits to the effort through writing about that pursuit and all the while continues to rail against a larger cultural value system that does not value his work as much as he feels it should. He depicts himself almost literally as a victim of his own intellect, and there is a deep ironic contrast in the final line in this passage. A "scholar's need" can be read as the

driving desire to pursue his work, but also as the literal need for sustenance. In this passage these two forces are played against each other. The pursuit of one tragically requires the negation of the other.

Pierce goes on to offer an even more thorough investigation of what he sees as the central cause of this dilemma:

Thereby I grew to consider how many base men, that wanted those parts which I had, enjoyed content at will and had wealth at command. I called to mind a cobbler, that was worth five hundred pound; a hostler, that had built a goodly inn, and might dispend forty pounds yearly by his land; a car-man in a leather pilch, that had whipped out a thousand pound out of his horse tail. 'And have I more wit than all these?' thought I to myself
Am I better born? Am I better brought up? Yea, and better favoured?
And yet I am a beggar? What is the cause? (53)

Whereas the previously quoted passage from Pierce's poem leans more towards anger and self-loathing, here Pierce reveals a smug sense of superiority. He looks at all the people in the world who have attained a level of economic success he could only dream of and judges the world to be unjust. Moreover, he even demonstrates an envy of those engaged in the aspects of book production that are valued more highly than the work of the writer: the "learning (of the ignorant) is rated after the value of the ink and paper, and the scrivener better paid for an obligation, than a scholar for the best poem he can make" (53-54). In short, Pierce is complaining that wit, in the traditional humanist sense of the word, has little marketplace value. Thus the text works at the opposite end of the problem formerly laid out in *Anatomy*. Whereas *Anatomy* argues that marketplace texts had no

humanistic value and therefore demonstrated either little wit or an abuse of wit, *Pierce* argues the inverse: humanist wit has no value in the marketplace. This movement from denial to recognition and into anger is the point at which Nashe as an author transitions from an insufferable embodiment of pretension into something resembling a tragic figure.

Modern readers are no doubt less sympathetic than contemporaries would have been to Pierce's claim that he is "better born," but what individual remotely confident in his or her own intellectual capabilities has not at one point or another looked at some more economically successful person and thought something akin to Pierce's lament of "And have I more wit than all these?" The fact that many of us—especially those of us in the humanities—would so readily empathize with Pierce's situation, I would argue, says more about our inheritance or adoption of humanist values than it does about our individually arrived at analyses of the injustices of the economic system. In fact, the more we empathize with Pierce's lament the more we are in danger of glossing over many important questions his argument would otherwise compel us to ask. It is problematic to assume that the cobbler or cart driver lacks wit whereas Pierce, who spends his life writing verse that nobody wants to financially support, possess more of it. Why is wit associated here with the writer's trade but not the cobbler's? For that matter, why does Nashe, or by proxy Pierce, think his work should have any market value at all? Why should we?⁹ There is an underlying assumption that the possession and employment of

⁹ My questions here are largely inspired by Antonio Gramsci's deconstruction of the concept of the intellectual in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. In it, Gramsci questions why we categorize work that involves a neuro-muscular activity as "non-intellectual" since, as he argues, all work involves the employment of the intellect. Gramsci concludes that our categorization of labor is derived for the nature of the work itself, but from socio-economic position of the one engaged in the work. E.g., a farmer who works a field is not suddenly a day laborer. For more, see Gramsci 7-10.

the humanist conception of wit in print should enable one to thrive economically. If Pierce is to be believed, the realities of the market clearly disagree.

At the same time that the text portrays wit as undervalued in the literary marketplace, it also characterizes patrons as secretly understanding wit's "true" market value and wanting to rob writers of the fruits of their wit without paying him his due. In a passage comparing the scholar-poet to the colonized Indian, Nashe argues that both are alike in how they are taken advantage of by the current system:

For what reason have I to bestow any of my wit upon him who bestows none of his wealth upon me? . . . These are the common courses of the world, which every man privately murmurs at, but none dares openly upbraid, because all artists for the most part are base-minded and like the Indian that have store of gold and precious stones at the command yet are ignorant of their value, and therefore let the Spaniards, the Englishmen and everyone load their ships with them without molestation; so they, enjoying and possessing the purity of knowledge, a treasure far richer than the Indian mines, let every proud Thraso be partaker of their perfections, repaying them no profit, and gild himself with the titles they give him, when he will scarce return them a good word for their labor. (141-142)

While Nashe may argue that both the scholar and the Indian are exploited victims, the Indian's goods have a real world market value and thus the very reason the Indian is being swindled. Meanwhile, as the previous hundred pages of *Pierce* have insistently argued, wit is not valued by either the patron or the general consumer. Thus *Pierce* is

trapped in a perpetual cycle of denying the purportedly poor marketplace value placed upon humanist wit and becoming angry when its marketplace value is acknowledged.

Nashe portrays wit as so alienated from the material system of exchange that he is ultimately forced to conclude that the general consumer does not desire "true wit" the way he desires the Indian's gold and, moreover, that he does not know how to assess its value. This two-fold point is demonstrated in the way Nashe concludes his comparison between wit and Indian gold with a statement resembling the Aesopian fable of the Rooster and the Pearl: "[G]ive me one of my young masters a book," he writes, "and he will put off his hat and blush, and so go his way" (142). Like the rooster in the Aesop's fable, the "young master" is perplexed by the pearl being offered to him. While both are purportedly cherished for their value when emptied of the abstracted concepts of literary value, the book has as little real world value and use to the patron as the pearl does to the rooster.

Yet Pierce and by proxy Nashe are not entirely martyrs for the humanist cause. As Lorna Hutson points out, there is a profound paradox involved in attacks of this kind if we read Nashe's text autobiographically, as most critics are wont to do.

The critical orthodoxy which explains Nashe's work as the commercially motivated expedients of a penniless but satirically gifted journalist is almost entirely based on the assumption that the carnivalesque text *Pierce Penilesse his Supplication to the Divell* (1592) is a kind of confessional autobiography. . . . This in turn produces the contradictory situation in which Nashe's texts, explicitly disassociating themselves from the contemporary commercial writing and deploring the effects of

commerciality, are ignored and their 'real' meaning discovered in the commercial interest assumed to have motivated them. (2-3)

The contradiction Hutson sees in reading into a text its economic motive and thereby ignoring the content of the text itself is furthered by critics who would attempt to read *Pierce* simultaneously as a text that deplors commercial literature on one hand, but who also admit that Nashe's employment of neologisms and colorful local descriptions serve as an "ingenious response to commercial demand" on the other (3). Hutson rejects this type of critical discourse on the grounds that "it becomes incapable of accounting for anything in [Nashe's] style which distinguishes it from a hack production" (94). Faced with this dilemma, she prefers to sever the association between authorial conditions and textual interpretation and read Nashe's texts not as texts produced by a singular author but as writing that displays "a parodic medium of dozens of public voices" (4). She chooses to read the complexities and contradictions in Nashe's texts as promoting a "carnavalesque" attitude that explores how "a lack of continuity and coherence, might function as a politically and morally significant aesthetic in its own right" (5). I propose in response that we read these sites of contention merely as indications of a struggle to come to terms with the relationship between humanist literary value and marketplace value.

If elements in Nashe's texts sometimes seem to make it difficult to differentiate him from a marketplace hack, I would argue that the fault is not due to an overdetermined employment of the author function, but rather that these points of seeming contradiction are the result of two factors: (1) the constructed binaries between humanist scholar and marketplace hack and (2) Nashe's own shifting attitudes towards the literary market.

Pierce at different moments is a site of denial, anger, and bargaining. The passages in *Pierce* that could be rendered indistinguishable from "a hack production" are sites of cultural and economic bargaining. If these passages render an authorial identity that seems unstable, this occurs because cultural bargaining by its very nature renders identity unstable.

Marketplace Wit

Thus far we have established how Nashe's early work serves to construct a binary between humanist wit and marketplace popularity and how Nashe's establishment of these binaries serve as subtle marketing to a popular audience. However, in his later texts, Nashe goes one step beyond this effort by overtly presenting arguments that cater to a popular audience and even champion the marketplace as a determiner of merit.

Nashe's style changes significantly from his earlier works to his later ones. Donald McGinn describes this shift as movement from "ornate euphuism" to a "colloquial style" (*Thomas Nashe* 18) and attributes it to the influence of the Martin Marprelate pamphlets¹⁰ on Nashe's own writing. As McGinn succinctly explains, the writer of the original Martin pamphlets employed a popular style that was, in many ways, antithetical to the labored prose employed by many university-educated men:

Martin Marprelate hit upon the idea of playing the buffoon in print. In a sort of monologue consisting of simple words and short sentences Martin mingles seemingly good-humored raillery with scandalous gossip about various prominent clergymen of the Established Church. With this device

¹⁰ Nashe's pamphlets were originally commissioned by the English government to counteract Puritan pamphlets written by a pseudonymous "Martin Marprelate" and designed to attack the episcopal organization or rule by bishops ("prelates") of the Church of England.

to arouse and maintain the interest of his reader he attacks the basic ecclesiastical organization. (*Thomas Nashe* 18)

Nashe was hired by the English state to compose anti-Martinist tracts, but being the quick study he was, Nashe adopted a style and a series of rhetorical stances that are very similar to Martin's. As McGinn points out, in *Almond for a Parrot* (1590) Nashe overtly boasts, "I speake plaine English, and call thee a knave in thine owne language" ("Nashe's Share in the Marpelate Contraversy" 961).¹¹

Even though Nashe's anti-Martinist pamphlets demonstrate a significant change in his prose style and rhetorical positioning, they only tangentially relate to the presentation of wit in the marketplace. Since Nashe was literally serving as a mouthpiece for church and state when he wrote them, they are by their very nature less invested in debates about the function of literature or the establishment of Nashe's own self-fashioned authorial persona. Thus, discussion of them is largely beyond the purview of this study. However, it is worth noting that the anti-Martinist track *Almond for a Parrot* was dedicated to Will Kemp, the famous jester and Shakespearean comedic actor. Kemp's appeal as an oral performer largely existed in contradistinction to the scholarly humanist tradition. For example, in *A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare: 1599*, James Shapiro points out that the jigs Kemp performed in Shakespeare's plays were often the most popular sections of the play and that a growing tension developed between jesters like Kemp and professional writers in the period.¹² In discussing Kemp's jigs and the tensions that developed between Kemp and Shakespeare, for example, Shapiro notes,

¹¹ For more on this shift in Nashe's prose style see McGinn's essay "Nashe's Share in the Marpelate Controversy" pages 960-962.

¹² For more on Kemp and Shakespeare's relationship, see Shapiro 36-42.

Jigs—anarchic and libidinal—were widely popular because they tapped into parts of the everyday experience usually left untouched in the world of the play. As such, they provided a counterpoint to the fragile closure of romantic comedy and to the high seriousness and finality of tragedy. . . . Dramatists understandably grumbled about the jigs (which were written not by playwrights but by hack ballad makers). It could not have been easy to surrender to the clown the last word (40-41).

Thus it is of particular relevance when, in his dedication to Kemp, Nashe writes,

Many write bookes to knights and men of great place, and haue thankes with promise of a further reward for their paines: others come of with a long Epistle of some ruffling Courtier, that swears swoundes and bloud, as soone as euer their backe is turnd, a man can not goe in the streets for these impudent beggers. To auoide therefore as well the worthlesse attendance on the one, as the vsual scorne of the other, I have made choise of thy amorous selfe to be the pleasant patron of my papers. (341)

The dedication to Kemp not only represents a siding with a popular figure among the commoners, it also demonstrates an eschewing of the traditional patronage system similar to the mock-dedication found at the end of *Pierce*. This open mockery of the patronage system both in *Pierce* and in *Almond* demonstrate how Nashe is moving ever closer towards embracing the literary marketplace, since outside of private patronage the marketplace is the sole venue open to a writer seeking to make a living and gain social recognition.

The public dispute between Nashe and Gabriel Harvey is more central to the discussion of wit, since it is heavily invested in the concept of literary merit. Furthermore, Nashe's antagonistic relationship with Harvey and the famous public quarrel that developed between them deserves special attention because of what it says about each writer's assumed position in the literary marketplace and how the parameters of that marketplace come to shape each author's assumed identity. The origins of the Harvey-Nashe feud are somewhat complicated. As cited early in this dissertation Gabriel Harvey's brother Richard dismissed Nashe's literary commentary in the preface to Greene's *Menaphon* as that of a pretentious writer who had not proven his own worth. Nashe in response took a few swipes at Richard's work in *Pierce Pennilesse*. But it was not until Harvey's publication of *Foure Letters* that the feud between Gabriel and Nashe moved to center stage.

Foure Letters (1592) contains the first open attack on Nashe by Gabriel Harvey, or at least the first among those that have survived. In it, Harvey, like his brother Richard before him, accuses Nashe of being precocious and not well enough educated to justify the literary commentary and subsequent attack upon Harvey's brother that Nashe embedded in *Pierce Pennilesse*. However, Harvey's attack quickly transitions from a defense of familial honor into at least an implied attack on Nashe's social status. Harvey refers to Nashe throughout as "Pierce" and describes Nashe's motivation for writing *Pierce* as desperate: "vexed with discredite, tormented with other mens felicite, and ouerwhelmed with his own miserey; in a raving, and franticke moode, most desparately exhibieth his supplication to the Diuell. A strange title, an od wit, and a mad hooreson, I warrant him" (44). The reference to Nashe as an "od wit," while not entirely condemning,

is Harvey's attempt to distance Nashe from the lineage of humanist wits. Nashe responded openly to Harvey in the pamphlet *Strange News* (1592). He announces that Harvey "hath raild upon me, without wit or art" and boasts that Harvey "would faine raile, if he had anie witte" (275). He further avers that he must defend himself against Harvey's attacks because Harvey "indeuord to take from mee all estimation of Arte or witte" (269). Thus Nashe clearly frames what is at stake in the debate as being the credibility of his own association with wit, the very thing he had up until that time made a living from by accusing other writers of abusing or lacking it.

As Alexandra Halasz points out, critics from McKerrow on have noted that it is difficult to find much in the way of real differences in attitudes or opinions between Harvey and Nashe, at least on the surface. Halasz ascribes this phenomenon to the fact that both writers inherited and internalized the values of humanist culture, and Halasz argues that the quarrel itself "functions as an index of humanist response to the development of print culture . . . in a discursive field no longer delimited by institutional sites of high literacy and audiences whose rank and status could be predicted" (87). The method of attacks and defense each writer employs makes it clear that Halasz is generally correct and that the tensions within these texts largely result from the uncertain relationship between humanist ideology and roles of the professional writer in the public marketplace. But the way these tensions play out center heavily on wit, on who displays it, and who best serves as wit's ambassador in the public sphere. While both writers evolve and adapt their arguments for a public audience, Harvey remains much more conservative than Nashe, trying to garner a paradoxical market appeal on the basis of his being an outsider, a traditional scholar that has been forced to defend his name in a public

forum. In this way, Harvey appeals to the traditional humanist conception of wit as antagonistic to and outside of the system of marketplace values. Contrarily, while Nashe also plays at the outsider by attempting to separate himself from charges of witlessness or marketplace hackery, he is much more willing to use arguments against university culture and pedantry. He even betrays a willingness to fundamentally subvert the humanist concept of wit as a binary opposite to marketplace demand, the very binary that he himself helps to construct in previous texts.

Nashe primarily responds to Harvey's attacks by presenting him as an outsider to the world of print who neither understands nor abides by the rules of the game that other professional writers must play. This theme is dominant throughout *Strange News*. For example, Nashe insinuates that Harvey has to pay to get his works published and, in contrast, implies that skillful writers are able to establish a marketplace demand for their works:

Hold vp thy hand, H. H., thou art heere indited for an incrocher vpon the fee-simple of the Latin, an enimie to Carriers, as one that takes their occupation out of their hands, and dost nothing but transport letterse vp and downe in thyne owne commendation, a conspiratour and practiser to make Printers rich, by making thy selfe ridiculous, a manifest briber of Bookesellers and Stationers, to helpe thee to sell away thy bookes (whose impressions thous paidst for) that thou mayst haue money to goe home to Trinitie Hall to discharge thy commons. (261)

While this passage is not an outright contradiction of his scathing attack upon the literary market in his earlier written works, Nashe does impute merit to the ability to thrive within

this marketplace, whereas Harvey, he claims, has bribed his way through the entire market system. The reference to taking work away from carriers is based on the charge that Harvey wrote praise of his own works under pseudonyms. The "conspiracy" to make Printers rich is not based upon the demand for Harvey's pamphlets but on his paying printers to produce them. Likewise, the claim of bribing booksellers indicates that the popular demand for his books had to be artificially created.

Throughout their dispute, Robert Greene's corpse gets tossed around as a metonym for the marketplace itself. Harvey refers to Greene as the "king of the paper stage" (275) and frequently portrays Greene a manipulator of the marketplace and a writer steeped in vices like gambling, whoring, and drinking. Nashe in turn accuses Harvey of not only unjustly attacking Greene, but using Greene's fame to his own profit: "If Greene were doggesicke and rain-sicke, sure he [Harvey] (poore secular Satirist) is dolt-sicke and brainelesse, that with the toothlesse gums of his Poetry so beuggeth a deadman" (275). He also accuses Harvey of manipulating the patronage system, stating that "if [any Nobleman] but halfe a glaunce on him, hele straight put it verie solemnly in print, and make it ten times more than it is" (276). Both of these rhetorical strategies are employed by Nashe to further position Harvey as a cultural outsider. Conversely, Nashe intentionally plays off of Greene's marketplace popularity and attempts to win that popular audience to his side by defending Greene's literary career. At one point, Nashe even addresses the marketplace readers directly and attempts to convince them that they should not let Harvey's feigned social position manipulate them into the thinking his writing has value:

O Heathenish and Pagan Hexameters, come thy waies down fro thy
 Doctourship, & learn thy Primer of Poetry ouer again, for certainly thy pen
 is in state of a Reprobate with all men of judgement and recognizing. . . .
 List, Pauls Churchyard (the peruser of euerie mans works, & Exchange of
 all Authors), you are a many of you honest fellows and favour men of wit.
 (277-278)

This passage reverses the normal order of authority. Rather than placing faith in university education and noble titles, Nashe places his faith in the reading public to see through what he views as bad writing and poor rhetoric.

In summarizing Nashe and Harvey's relationship, Halasz observes, "Unlike Harvey, who claims an authority external to his pamphlet discourse (that of a learned man, standing and waiting for the call to a platform), Nashe makes his claim rest on pamphlet platforms materially and idiomatically inextricable from the marketplace" (403). However, this position somewhat contradicts the stance Nashe takes in his earlier works towards this marketplace. Whereas in texts such as *Anatomy of Abuses* and *Pierce Pennilesse* Nashe positions the literary marketplace as a space that betrays and abuses wit, here he explicitly references Paul's Churchyard, the place where booksellers gathered to push their wares, and refers to the authors and patrons participating in the system of marketplace exchanges as "honest fellows" who "favor men of wit" (277-278). In praising the merits of the marketplace audience and its purported ability to recognize true wit, Nashe has essentially made a deal with the devil of his own creating.

CHAPTER V

ROBERT GREENE'S ECONOMICAL WIT

Introduction

Robert Greene's late career characterizations of his earlier works as unvirtuous texts written for money allow for easy conclusions about his position in the market, conclusions that many of his contemporaries and later critics take for granted. But as is true of most individuals, Greene's presentation of his younger self and his earlier works are limited in what they can tell us. In the process of constructing cohesive biographical narratives, we often leave the messy details of day to day life by the wayside. This is no less true for the social life of texts than it is for individuals.

Undoubtedly, Greene was very successful at delivering what the reading public wanted. This ability is so widely recognized that some critics even posit Greene as an iconic representation of the first professional writer. For example, John Clark Jordan writes that "it was one of Greene's most deep-rooted characteristics to write what he thought he would have a market for" (19). Irving Ribner similarly claims, "Greene, we know, was a writer who capitalized upon the literary tastes of his times. He gave the public what it wanted, imitating whatever was currently in vogue, so that the vast body of his extant writings in verse and prose furnishes an excellent index of changing taste in Elizabethan letters" (414). Lori Newcomb describes Greene as "widely recognized as a trade phenomenon" (*Reading Popular Romance* 55). Steve Mentz refers to him as "the early modern prose author as English literary culture imagined him in 1592" ("Forming Greene" 116). In these and other characterizations, Greene is often positioned as not just a popular writer, but metonymic for the very concept of marketplace demand, and his

texts are often viewed as touchstones for understanding popular literary tastes in the last few decades of the sixteenth century.

Many accounts of Greene by his contemporaries betray a similar perspective. Greene's widely recognized popularity allowed Thomas Nashe to confidently write in *Pierce Pennilesse* that "In night & day would [Greene] haue yarkt vp a Pamphlet as well as in seauen yeare, and glad was that Printer that might bee so blest to pay him deare for the very dregs of his wit" (221). The "very dregs of his wit" is, of course, a backhanded compliment, since Nashe metaphorically implies that Greene's writing sometimes scraped the bottom of the barrel in terms of quality or perhaps even in terms of Greene's intellectual capability. Yet this characterization also implies a nearly endless marketplace interest in Greene's intellectual productions as the demand for his works outstripped his ability to supply them.

As Nashe's observation also hints, because of how prolific and opportunistic his literary productions were, Greene gained a reputation as being something of a hack writer. No doubt this reputation was partly due to the attacks of Gabriel Harvey in his *Four Letters* (1592), in which Harvey described Greene and William Elderton, a contemporary Elizabethan balladeer, as "two notorious mates, & the very ringleaders of the riming, and scribbling crew" (15). It should be noted that Harvey had a personal interest in attacking Greene, since Greene had previously issued veiled criticism of Harvey's brother in *A Quip for an Upstart Courtier* (1592). Moreover, Harvey's personal agenda is further demonstrated in the way he goes on to accuse Greene of every possible vice, from drinking and gambling to blasphemy and whoring. However, other contemporaries made similar charges. In his dedicatory epistle for *The Second Part of*

the French Academy (1594), for example, Thomas Bowes characterizes Greene as a writer who "had the Presse at his commandement to publish his lasciuious Pamphlets" ("To the Christian Reader" 104). The perceived validity of these accusations were strengthened by Greene, who published numerous works late in his career recanting his earlier way of living and expressing regret for his earlier work, which he characterized using such terms as "vaine fantasies," "follies," "wanton fits," and "laciuous pamphleting."

Along similar lines, later critics—even early twentieth-century ones—frequently reinforced this portrayal of Greene as a literary hack. Charles Crupi points out that Greene published over thirty pamphlets before his death at age thirty-four and argues that Greene's work was "not always scrupulous by modern standards," since "he freely pieced out some of his works with unacknowledged translations, borrowings from other writers, and repetitions from his own earlier works" (13). John S. Weld bluntly accuses Greene's novels of "bear[ing] witness, of course, to the mediocre talents of a hack. . . ." (171). Edwin Miller characterizes Greene as a veritable ambulance chaser of patronage and documents the many cases wherein Greene would dedicate his writings to recent widows of wealthy noblemen. In a particularly amusing example, Miller points to the dedication from Greene's *Menaphon* to Lady Hales, wife of the recently deceased nobleman, James Hales. In it Greene writes,

hearing (madam) of the passions your Ladiship hath uttered a late for the losse of your husband, a Knight in life worshipfull, vertuous, and full of honorable thoughts; discouering by such passionate sorrowes the patterne of a louing and vertuous wife, whose joys liued in hir husbands weale, and

ended with his life, I thought it my dutie to write this pastoral historie . . .

(5)

A fuller citation from this passage would do nothing to alleviate the stark juxtaposition of Greene's lamenting Hales's recent death with Greene's hawking of his newest pastoral romance. Greene offers only the hope that his work may demonstrate to Lady Hales the nature of Fortune's "inconstant follies" and, even more generically, that it may serve as a "little treatise for recreation" in her time of mourning (6). These vague associations do little to convince readers that there is any significant thematic connection to be made between *Menaphon* and Hales's death, let alone support Greene's claim that he actually wrote the work specifically for the occasion, as he claims in this passage. Miller characterizes this type of behavior as a "bold exploitation of patrons" and characterizes Greene as "one of the best known of the Elizabethan literary hacks, among those complicit in the establishment of what he refers to as the "Elizabethan epitaph factory" (118), classically trained writers who are reduced to literary careers that amount to literal poetic panhandling.

Moreover, these types of characterizations of Greene and his work are fairly common throughout the twentieth century. Greene's mid-twentieth-century editor and biographer, Alexander Grosart, goes even further than many other critics by attempting to paint Greene's literary career as demonstrative of an existential crisis, the narrative of a prodigal author who, at the height of his career, saw the error of his earlier ways and then perpetually relapsed and failed to reach his newly found lofty literary aims:

. . . Greene was at the height of his literary fame at about 1589. . . . But as soon as Greene attained so privileged a position (a position which he

hardly dared to dream of during the early part of his London life), a torturing doubt on the usefulness of his literary work crept into his soul. His literary fame, the favour of influential people, the admiration of his friends, and his material profits,--all these would have been more than sufficient for any other man; but Greene was dissatisfied. It seems that this literary hack, this debauchee [*sic*], saturated in the mire of a dissolute life, took an exalted view of the aim of literature. In his eyes a true author was a good teacher of the people, who helped them to understand the deep and important meaning of life. (31)

Grosart's overly dramatic binaries in this passage offer more insight into his own humanist ideological alignment than they do Greene's: "literary hack," "debauchee," and a writer "saturated in the mire of a dissolute life" are all presented on one side of an opposition while an "exalted view" of literature, a "good teacher," "true author," and a conveyor of "deep" and "important" meaning are placed on the other. In Grosart's view, these binaries define the central conflict that exhibits itself in Greene's later work, but in order to accept Grosart's reading, we must view Greene's writing of his earlier texts as wayward activities and his later ones as entirely sincere and heart-felt. When Greene "looked at his love-pamphlets, written solely to amuse," Grosart argues, "from the exalted point of view, they appeared to him, not only useless, but positively hurtful and iniquitous" (31-32). He does note that Greene's recantations were not matched with "a corresponding change in his mode of life" and that Greene continued to write plays long after arriving at his "exalted point of view," but neither of these factors seems to shake Grosart's confidence in the sincerity of Greene's repentance pamphlets (32).

Yet despite how often contemporaries, later critics, and even Greene himself negatively characterize his literary productions as that of a hack writer, we should recognize that these depictions are all somewhat retroactive. In the earliest of Greene's pamphlets, the paratextual information persistently characterizes Greene as both a poet-scholar *and* a popular writer. Greene's extended titles often imply some sort of virtuous aim. For example, the title page of Greene's first romance pamphlet, *Mamillia* (1583), promises to tell a tale of how "firm faith" is "brought asleepe by fading fancie . . . until wit joyned with wisdome, doth awake it by the helpe of reason." The introductory material often goes even further in its attempts to frame Greene's early to mid-career pamphlets as important and worthwhile texts. Roger Portington's commendation at the front of *Mamillia* compares Greene to Homer, Virgil, Ovid, and Cicero, and it positions the book as an example of how "No finer wittes in Grecia raigned then Britayne breedes" (9). The introductory poem to *Alcida: Greene's Metamorphosis* (1588) characterizes Greene's work as an example of how "Inter Philosophos laudem meruere Poetae, / Qui levibus miscent feria metria ocis" ["Poets deserve praise among philosophers, / When they mix weighty meter and lighthearted wit"] (68-69).¹ As discussed in the previous chapter, Nashe's preface to Greene's *Menaphon* constructs a stark contrast between abusers of wit and true scholar-poets and positions Greene firmly on the side of the latter. Similarly, most of the title pages of Greene's early and mid-career works make prominent mention of the fact that he holds a Master of Arts from Cambridge, another sign of the cultural prestige these texts attempted to cultivate. The title page of the first part of *Mamillia* (1583) refers to him as "Robert Greene Graduate in Cambridge." The second

¹ Translated by Dale Grote. For Grote's complete translation of the entire poem, see *The University Wits: Robert Green*, 69-70.

part (1593) presents him as "Robert Greene Master of Arts, in Cambridge." The title page of *Myrrour of Modesty* (1584) abbreviates his name in order to forefront his degree by referring to him as "R. G. Maister of Artes," and *Orpharion* (1599) employs the comically pretentious Latinized nomenclature "Robertus Greene, in Artibus Magister."

Obviously, the paratextual material used to introduce and market texts should not be taken at face value, but it is, nonetheless, indicative of the way Greene and his publishers attempted to position these works as serious literary endeavors. Aside from the almost obligatory references to his works as toys and trifles in his own introductions, the paratextual material continuously attempts to make an argument for these texts as facilitators of wit, wisdom, and virtue. To this end, Kirk Melnikoff points out that, though the fact was "frequently passed over by the many heirs of Harvey, *past and present* . . . Greene's work was conceived as England's answer to the laureate achievements of Greece and Rome, and to the modern literary triumphs of Europe" (xix, italics added).

One of the most insightful modern critics of Greene is Lori Newcomb, specifically because of the way she re-contextualizes the discussion of "popular" or "hack" writing in a way that allows us to move beyond the blind spots of this nomenclature. As Newcomb points out, the notion of hack writing is largely related to our concept of "popular" fiction, a concept that had not yet fully emerged in the nascent period of the English literary marketplace. Following Roger Chartier's deconstruction of the modern division of the *populaire* and the *savant*, Newcomb notes,

The category we now recognize as "popular culture" was constituted socially, as a reclassification of early print forms that had originated

within a "collective culture . . . from which the dominant classes or the various elites only slowly distanced themselves." Early modern print fiction, in particular, had circulated among other socially diverse cultural practices; like other such practices, fiction consumption was increasingly linked to social differentiation. As early modern England became a print-reading culture in which readers, authors, and texts proliferated, the socially and culturally elite found the need for a boundary between elite and popular cultures more acute than ever before. The growing collection of cultural commodities that we now call early modern print fiction was repositioned by a discourse that sought to distinguish elite from popular culture, and that discourse has delimited our understanding of early fiction ever since. ("Social Things" 753)

Newcomb implies that it is the terminology that we use to describe fiction that betrays its placement: popular or literary. As she wryly observes in *Reading Popular Romance*, "Canonized authors are said to be self-conscious and in control of their personae; other writers are portrayed as calculating and exploitative" (25). Both of these observations serve Newcomb's larger project of attempting to "defamiliarize" our common assumptions about popular and literary works in order to show "their common conditions of possibility" (24). In Greene's case, she argues that his texts catered to a diverse audience that was only retroactively stigmatized by writers in the 1590s and the first half of the seventeenth century. She attributes much of Greene's economic success to his "dual literary parentage in both the essentially oral (rhetorical) training of the humanist university and the primarily print-based world of Elizabethan book trade" ("Social

Things" 757). Greene's widespread popularity, Newcomb argues, was based on the "twin appeals of novelty and pleasure," appeals which transcended social distinction and which, at the time of their initial publication and reception, would not have carried the social stigma of being hack productions (760).

If, however, the label of the hack is largely a matter of social construction, why is it that Greene's texts in particular became retroactively characterized as the product of hack writing by contemporaries, by later literary critics, and even by Greene himself? In *Reading Popular Romance*, Newcomb attempts to partially explain this phenomenon by appealing to Bourdieu's method of contextualizing authors' and texts' social positions. As succinctly summarized by Newcomb, Bourdieu identifies authorial positions as being the result of (1) "the 'position' of the writer in his society, and specifically within a certain genre or mode" and (2) "the 'disposition' of the writer, meaning his 'habitus,' the personality traits shaped by his 'social trajectory' (29).² A composite of various authors, works, and their relationships to one another allows us to examine the regulatory boundaries for a particular genre of fiction (i.e., the implicit rules that establish and perpetually reconstitute perceptions of which works are considered good or bad representations of that genre). Newcomb explores Greene's reputation as an author within the space of the romance genre and, more specifically, by examining the historicity of the reception of Greene's *Pandosto* (1588). She compares *Pandosto's* reception with that of Sidney's *Arcadia* and argues that the two texts originally occupied

² It is worth noting that Bourdieu complicates this system of analysis by pointing out that the position of writers and the entire social matrix within which they exist is fluid in its evolution rather than mechanical or constant. He writes, "For example, the influx, in the 1850s, of a large number of writers living with precarious means on the lower edges of the field is retranslated into a redefinition of the post. i.e., of the image of the writer, his sartorial symbolism, his political attitudes, his preferred haunts (cafe rather than salon), etc." (62).

a similar social space and that Greene's work was only "categorized as popular much more gradually" (30). Newcomb's positioning of Greene in juxtaposition to Sidney offers a fascinating account of how two relatively comparable works' receptions were initially similar despite Sidney's occupying a more prestigious social position. She ultimately argues that this phenomenon demonstrates the "volatility" of the romance genre as a literary field that was, at the time of these texts' production, still "without clear models or intentional controls" to differentiate them as elitist or popular at the point of their initial production (30). While the romance genre had existed for centuries, it was a genre that the traditional humanists tended to look down upon as unworthy of dissection or emulation, a fact that may partially explain the genre's lack of clear cultural regulation.

Newcomb's approach provides an insightful corrective, allowing us to better see Greene's work through the lens of its original reception rather than only through that of its later stigmatized reputation. However, her approach cannot completely explain the change in the reception of Greene's work. It cannot, for example, entirely explain why Greene himself cast aspersions on his earlier work. For example, Newcomb argues against cynical interpretations that Greene's repentance texts were written solely for literary profit and points out that it is difficult to imagine that Greene could have anticipated the trajectory of his literary career from the start. Instead she hypothesizes that his "postponed repentance" occurs because Greene could "see no way to reform the career that he eventually improvised for himself" (*Reading Popular Romance* 28). However this argument does not explain why he felt the need to reform his literary career in the first place nor does it help us to better understand the precise relationship between

Greene's earlier texts and his later ones outside of rightly contested narrative portrayals of Greene as a wayward hack turned prodigal.

There are other ways of framing Greene's texts and his status in the marketplace outside of the genre of the romance that may help with these tasks. For while most of Greene's earlier texts fit the description of "romances," they also belong to other systems of categorization as well. John Carpenter, for example, discusses the pamphlet itself as a mode of discourse and argues that pamphlets, the material form in which most of Greene's texts were originally presented to readers, also served as "a field in which volatility and positional anxiety became synergistic, contributed to both authorial strategizing and to the complication of its effect" (149). Carpenter's study primarily examines the strategies used by various authors to associate or distance themselves from the pamphlet form. He focuses particularly on the strategies employed by Thomas Deloney, a contemporary of Robert Greene. But in passing he argues that, like other authors in the period, Greene's "casting aspersions" on Deloney and other ballad makers "was not an anomaly, especially within the commentary of ambitious writers anxious to carve a social and economic niche for themselves" (140).

Contextualizing Greene's work inside the frame of the romance genre or the ballad is useful for understanding Greene and his texts' social position in a nuanced fashion. These approaches are certainly an improvement over the employment of problematic terms such as popular fiction or hack productions, terms which dismiss or overlook much of the complexity of Greene's reception. However, even these frames are still limited in their ability to help us understand the relationship between Greene's earlier work and his later repentance texts. The "repentant hack" narrative employed by earlier

critics, as problematic as it may be, is appealing to critics and general readers alike specifically because of its ability to bridge this gap and helps to explain the relationship between Greene's earlier texts and his later ones. Thus I want to offer another position from which to examine Greene's work—one arrived at through the interpretative framework I have been developing in this study—and that is an examination of Greene's relationship to the concept of humanist literary value and humanist wit.

Thus far I have examined two writers who could be positioned on opposite ends of a spectrum in regards to their attitudes towards the nature and function of wit. In the two *Euphues* novels, Lyly deconstructs the relationship between wit and wisdom and between the employment of elegant phrases and the adoption of virtuous action. Nashe, on the other hand, mostly works at associating wit with virtue and positions them on one side of a humanist divide with his characterization of marketplace hacks occupying the other. Robert Greene's texts, I will argue, have attributes of both of these positions, and Greene's career demonstrates a transition between them. Early in his career, Greene mimics Lyly both in style and in substance, both in relentlessly reemploying the Euphuistic prose sensibilities Lyly popularized and in presenting plot after plot that further denies the association between wit and virtuous action. Moreover, I will argue, Greene's texts move even further in this direction than Lyly's in the way they fashion wit as an aesthetic emptied of humanist ideological associations. In his later series of repentance pamphlets, however, Greene adopts sensibilities much more in line with those of Nashe. The binaries that Nashe illustrates abstractly between humanist scholars and marketplace hacks in his early and mid-career texts is one that Greene's later texts attempt

to embody in an authorial persona of prodigality, but this shift is a gradual one and we can see signs of its development as Greene's career progresses.³

By examining three of Greene's early texts (*Mamillia part 1*, *A Myrroure of Modesty*, and *Menaphon*) and three of his later career works (*A Quip for an Upstart Courtier* and two later repentance pamphlets, *Groatesworth of Wit* and *Vision*), I intend to demonstrate that aside from viewing Greene's earlier texts as romances and his later ones as repentance pamphlets, these texts can also be positioned as part and parcel of the discourse located at the crossroads between the humanist conception of wit and marketplace demand. Greene's employment of the concept of wit in his early texts furthers the separation of wit from virtue inaugurated by Lyly. In the process, these early texts ultimately facilitate an aestheticizing of rhetorical wit by pushing it further away from its ideological associations with early humanist discourse and more towards an association with desirability in the game of courtship. Furthermore, as I will argue, Greene's renunciation of his earlier work is an attempt to reposition his conception of wit in order to regain the perceived loss of his cultural capital and to capitalize on a binary division of humanist-scholar and marketplace hack. But this attempt is one that ultimately fails to define or model a division effectively, since these later texts ultimately collapse the distinction between humanist wit and marketplace forces.

Aestheticized Wit

I want to begin my discussion of Greene's early work by briefly tracing these texts' relationship to John Lyly. There is a clear line of influence not only between Greene's early narrative style and Lyly's, something many critics acknowledge, but also between their conceptions of wit, a topic that has received far less attention. Moreover,

³ For a discussion of the concept of prodigality, see Chapter III pages 68-69.

the relationship of Lyly's texts to the humanist literary tradition also establishes a model that Greene's early work attempts to mirror. Thus Greene's early work has as much in common with the humanist tradition to which Lyly is responding as it does the romance genre within which Newcomb and others contextualizes it. Greene's debt to Lyly in this regard should not be underestimated. He published numerous works that clearly reference Lyly's *Euphues* texts in their titles⁴ and many more that overtly copy Lyly's style and that reference his popular prose narratives. In the introductory epistle to *Menaphon* (1589), one of Greene's mid-career works, Greene literally makes the argument that he is picking up where Lyly left off. Greene frames the entirety of *Menaphon* as a letter "written" by Camilla, the English princess in the second *Euphues* novel, as a "warning" to Lyly's protagonist. In the introductory epistle, Greene argues, "But resting upon your fauors I haue thus farre aduentured to let you see Camillas alarum to Euphues, who thought it necessarie not to let Euphues censure to Philautus passe without requitall" (7). This passage could be read as a direct reference to Euphues' *Cooling Card to Philautus*, a fictional letter appearing near at the end of *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit*. As discussed in Chapter III, Euphues criticizes his friend Philautus within this letter for devoting his time and energy towards courtship rather than scholarship. By framing *Menaphon* as a direct response to Lyly's works and positioning

⁴ Greene's *Menaphon: Camillas Alarum to a Slumbering Euphues* (1589) and *Euphues: His Censure to Philautus* (1587) contain the most direct titular references. However, as Lori Newcomb notes, other texts exhibit "a formula that neatly follows the title of *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit*—a protagonist's name and a fanciful genre name exploring a broad theme" (*Reading Popular Romance* 48). A fuller list of titles that follow this slightly more abstracted Lylyan pattern throughout Greene's career would include *Mamillia: A Mirror or Looking Glasse for the Ladies of England* (1583), *Gwyndonius: The Card of Fancy* (1584), *Arabasto: The Anatomie of Fortune* (1584), and *Morando: The Tritameron of Love* (1584).

it in between the two *Euphues* novels in his own introduction, Greene sets up his own work as a sequel of sorts to Lyly's most popular texts.

Nevertheless as a promised follow up to the *Euphues* narratives, Greene's text fails to deliver. Outside of this titular and introductory framework, *Menaphon* shares neither characters nor plot associations with Lyly's texts. In fact, outside of the aforementioned passage in the text's introduction, there is only one direct reference to *Euphues* in the entirety of *Menaphon*'s narrative. Greene's title and introductory references thus reveal themselves as little more than strategies for name dropping Lyly in the most transparent of ways and as a marketing device to promote Greene's own works.

It would be a mistake, however, to assume the relationship of Greene's texts to Lyly's are entirely a matter of marketing and lacking in any more meaningful associations. Three of Greene's earliest works—*Mamillia* parts 1 and 2, and *A Myrroure of Modesty*—closely copy the Euphuistic style that Lyly popularized. Like *Euphues*, *Mamillia* is comprised of a series of long rhetorical speeches largely serving to facilitate the game of courtship between characters. The narrative of *Mamillia*, which Walter Davis refers to as "the most slavish of the imitations of *The Anatomy of Wit*" (202), is largely a gender inversion of *Anatomy* wherein a young maiden, Mamillia, is warned of the dangers of court life and witty language and fails to heed the warning. Just as Eubulus warns Euphues of the vices of the Naples' court life, Florion warns Mamillia of the similar dangers in the court life of Padua. Just as Lucilla betrays Euphues' profession of love, Pharicles betrays Mamillia's.

There are also deeper thematic connections between the Euphues novels and *Mamillia*. Both narratives focus heavily on a deconstruction of the relationship between

rhetorical wit and virtuous behavior. Early on in the text, Mamillia laments that Pharicles' "beauty argues inconstancy; and his filed phrases, deceit" (25). Pharicles takes this type of mistrust of sophisticated rhetoric even a step further and declares, "whatsoever learning willes, I will consent vnto Nature: for the best clarkes are not euer the wisest men," a statement that mirrors Euphues' argument at the opening of *Anatomy of Wit* that Nature, rather than nurture, defines his character and guides his actions. Later the narrator laments the Italian gentlemen whose "rype wittes are so soone overshadowed with vice and their senses so blinded with self loue, that they make their choyce so farre without skill, as they proue themselves but euill chapman" (35). The plot itself reinforces this skepticism about the value of rhetorical wit, since despite the sententious warning she receives and acknowledges, Mamillia falls for Pharicles, who, as she earlier suspects, proves an inconstant suitor. As with *Euphues: Anatomy of Wit*, it is only experience, not *sententia*, that serves as a corrective force throughout the narrative.

A Myrroure of Modesty, Greene's second pamphlet, also heavily copies Lyly's established format in terms of style and structure. Alexandar Grosart, Greene's editor, curiously describes *Myrroure of Modesty* as a text that "does not afford any interest, either from a biographical or literary point of view" and further contends that "[t]he wish to imitate Lyly here approaches the ridiculous" (71). Yet while *Myrroure* does employ the euphuistic style heavily and prominently features long passages where characters put their rhetorical skills on display, it deviates significantly from a romance plot focused on courtship. Instead, it centers on Susanna, the faithful wife of a monarch, who is confronted by two judges simultaneously confessing their lust for her.⁵ They deliver her

⁵ It should be noted that this narrative is a retelling of the story of the same name in the Apocrypha. If there is an intermediate text between the Apocryphal version and Greene's, it has not been noted in the

an ultimatum: either she must have sex with both of them, or they will accuse her of adultery in front of the court. Susanna refuses, is put on trial, and found guilty. Shortly before she is executed a young man steps forward to challenge the judges' stories and tricks them by asking each independently to identify under which tree the affair occurred. After they give contradictory answers, Susanna is set free and the judges' deceit is revealed. While *Myrrour* is less skeptical of wit than *Mamillia*, the text still relentlessly copies Lyly's euphuistic style and is heavily laden with aphoristic statements that prove little more than window dressing. Like *Mamillia* before it, the wisdom delivered in the text has no association with the plot's ultimate conclusion. In fact, the very notion that the two Judges appear educated and well-spoken and are therefore more likely to be believed is held against Susanna. In attempting to seduce her, the Judges warn, "Our office and authoritie, our age and honor shall suffice to witness our wordes to be true" (25).

Numerous critics have noticed this gap between the supposed virtuous advice that Greene's early texts purport to promote and the fact that the plot resolution in these texts rarely is the result of the internalizing of any kind of lesson. For example, Walter Davis points out this discrepancy and characterizes it as an inheritance from Greek Romance, which he describes as facilitating "action devoid of meaning" (229). Davis argues, "To put the matter perhaps too simply, the writers of the prose fiction in the 1580s, faced with the opposed models of the Euphuistic mode and Greek romance, were essentially confronted with a choice between dialogue expressive of character and ideas but devoid

scholarship on the text. Grossart, Greene's editor, identifies no source for text and largely dismisses any critical discussion of it, as indicated above. Lori Newcomb, in passing, characterizes it as one of Greene's "framed collection of tales" that "take female virtues as their primary topics" but makes no reference to the work's origination (*Reading Popular Romance* 46). In general, the text has garnered very little critical attention.

of action, and action devoid of meaning" (229). Davis characterizes the overall movement of Greene's narrative style as a movement away from the Euphuistic form and towards Greek romance. He goes on to argue that this movement is "carried to its logical conclusion" in Greene's cony-catching pamphlets wherein "values or moral states have no contact with reality, human action has of itself no ethical dimension, but only an amoral code" (248). Brenda Cantar, by comparison, associates this passivity with a trend among Greene's female protagonists, who, she argues, are "figured as powerless emblems of an idealized female passivity" (283).⁶ Similarly, Richard Helgerson notes that the characters in Greene's works are often reduced to pawns in a much more dramatic way than they are in *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit*:

In Lyly's novel passion overturns precept and nature upsets nurture, but, if successfully adhered to, precept and nurture would guard one against the dangers of love. In Greene precept and nurture are equally irrelevant, and virtue, however resolute, provides no defense against vice. Virtue and vice are alike pawns in the hands of all-governing fortune, and in some of the stories fortune dispenses altogether with the instrument of passion, creating disorder by mere natural accident. (*Elizabethan Prodigals* 81)

Helgerson's insistence of what "would have" happened in Lyly's texts had the characters not disregarded good advice seems somewhat odd, not only because hypothesizing about the likely alternative outcome of a text is suspect, but also because a large part of the argument of Lyly's text in general is that precepts are decidedly *not* adhered to and are therefore incapable of successfully guiding virtuous action.

⁶ For more discussion on passivity in Greene's narratives, see Davis 200-251 and Cantar 271-286.

Nevertheless, Helgerson is correct that there seems to be even less of an association between wise instruction and virtuous action in Greene than in Lyly. This fact is largely a result of the way in which wit in Greene's early texts is largely aestheticized and often folded almost entirely into the rhetoric of courtship. Examples of this phenomenon occur throughout *Mamillia*. Pharicles associates a "solemne sutor" with a "wittlesse wooer." Mamillia similarly associates courtship and wit when she states, "I haue beene brought up in the court, and although my bewtie be small and witlesse, yet I have beene dered of many, and could neuer fancy any" (67). There is an implied contrast in this passage between being "witlesse" and being desirable. Moreover, wit here is used as an adjective to modify beauty. This association may at first seem odd to modern readers, especially since modern constructs of attraction often position beauty and intelligence as binary opposites. However, as Catherine Bates notes, the game of courtship in the Elizabethan era is highly dependent upon the employment of rhetorical wit. Discussing the relationship between these two concepts in *Euphues*, Bates deduces that "the very rhetorical indeterminacy which arose from debating for debating's sake provides Lyly with an obvious parallel for the sexual ambivalence of the courtship-situation—its teasingly licensed eroticism, and the uncertainty of sexual roles" (104-105). In Greene the game of wit is no longer merely a parallel, but entirely contextualized in this fashion. As a result, wit itself becomes directly associated with beauty and desirability.

This process of collapsing the distinction between courtship and wit perhaps reaches its apex in Greene's *Menaphon*, a complex blending of the romance and pastoral traditions in which a king, his daughter, her husband, and their son are all eventually

separated from one another. They all end up in the pastoral world of Arcadia, and unbeknownst to any of them, reunited, under different aliases and disguised in shepherd's clothing. The majority of the text takes the form of pastoral discourse with frequent eclogues and agons. Yet there is a dark undertone throughout, since the husband, son, and father all unknowingly woo the daughter and fight over her until the situation is once again resolved by an external force, this time by a messenger from the oracle, that explains away all of the happenings as a matter of prophecy foretelling the restitution of the kingdom. The narrative trades heavily on its blending of the epic, romance, and pastoral forms. For example, when the husband ends up gathering a shepherd army outside the son's castle walls to rescue the daughter, the contrast between the Arcadian setting and a Trojan War-like plot is highlighted for comedic value. "I pray you tell me which is Agamemnon?" the son pithily retorts as he looks out at the shepherd army (130). By presenting conceits that overlap various generic traditions, *Menaphon* is able to cater to the tastes of multiple potential audiences simultaneously: scholarly, courtly, and popular. While there is undoubtedly overlap between these audiences, Greene's text seems constructed to play to all sides simultaneously.

Though both Greene and his critics characterize *Menaphon* as carrying on the project begun by Lyly, this brief accounting of the major motifs of the narrative should indicate that Greene's work has little in the way of a direct narrative association with Lyly's. However the one place in the narrative that makes a clear reference to Lyly is worth discussing in detail. When Melicertus, the husband, comes to woo Samela (who is, unbeknownst to him, his lost wife), the narrator states that "he could not tell how to court her: yet at length calling to remembrance her rare wit" approached her and requests that

she allow him her company (81). In presenting his request he uses elaborate phrasing, comparing his service to her to Paris's courting of Helen and proclaims, "if you shall vouch to deigne of, I shall be as glad of such accepted seruice, as Paris first was of his best beloued Paramour" (81). Her response and the subsequent narrative explanation are worth citing in full:

Samela, looking on the shepheardes face, and seeing his vtterances full of broken sighs, thought to bee pleasant with her shepheard thus. *Arcadies Apollo*, whose brightnesse draws euerie eye to turne as the *Heliotropion* doth after her load; fairest of the shepheards, the Nimphees sweetest object, womens wrong, in wronging manie with ones due; welcome and so welcome, as we vouchsafe of your seruice, admitte of your companie and of him that is the grace of al companies, and if we durst vpon any light pardon, woulde venter to request you shew vs a cast of your cunning. *Samela* made this replie, because she heard him so superfine, as if *Ephoebus* had learnd him to refine his mother tongue, wherefore thought he had done it of an inkhorne desire to be eloquent; and *Melicertus* thinking that *Samela* had learn with *Lucilla* in *Athenesto* anatomize wit, and speake none but *Similes*, imagined she smoothed her talke to be thought like *Sapho*, *Phaos* Paramour. (82)

I want to highlight several elements of this passage. First, *Samela* mocks *Melicertus*'s language and characterizes his rhetoric as Euphuistic ("as if *Ephoebus* had learnd him to refine his mother tongue") and as demonstrating "an inkhorne desire to be eloquent." This mocking serves as commentary on the already dissipating popularity of the Euphuistic

style that Greene had employed many times before. Just as Lyly's later works gradually relied less and less on the euphuistic form, so did Greene's. Melicertus's speech thus stands out as excessively ornate, compared to the rest of the text. Second, while Melicertus misinterprets her mocking tone as merely a return of eloquent rhetoric in a game of courtship, he too immediately associates the rhetoric with Lyly's *Euphues* ("thinking that Samela had learned with Lucilla in Athens to anatomize wit"). Thus both characters immediately associate witty verbal play with *Euphues* and *Euphues* with the game of courtship. W. W. Barker remarks that Samela's response in this passage resembles Juliet's complaint to Romeo, "You kiss by th' book." As he argues, the passage as a whole is demonstrative of a rhetorical shift wherein "[t]he exchange is no longer academic . . . it is still performance, but the place of the performance has shifted from the hall or classroom to the sitting room, the garden, or the dinner table" (190). Through both of these characters' references to *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit*, Greene presents an interpretation of Lyly's text as a major lesson in how to play at the game of courtship, whereas Lyly's ultimate point is, at least at face value, concerned with the polar opposite. *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit* ends with the protagonist eschewing the values of courtship and devoting himself to the pursuit of the life of the mind. Moreover, wit in *Anatomy* is continuously presented as a dangerous characteristic that can lead to vice through the privileging of one's own intelligence and the ability to argue eloquently over sage advice and virtuous behavior. Meanwhile in *Menaphon*, as in the earlier *Mamillia: part 1*, wit is presented as an aesthetic value, emptied of humanist ideological associations and presented only as a type of social capital to be employed in the game of courtship.

Repentant Wit

Before discussing Greene's repentance texts and contextualizing their presentation of wit alongside Greene's earlier work, I would like to briefly examine a late-career text that evidences shifts in Greene's attitude towards wit and the humanist conception of literature. *A Quip for an Upstart Courtier* (1592) is the first of Greene's two dream narratives. The dream is divided into two parts. In the first part, Greene walks through a garden whose various flowers exemplify some sort of virtue or vice, one usually associated with the type of person who is gathering it. In the second part, Greene arrives on a hillside upon which he sees two pairs of bodiless breeches, one composed of cloth, the other composed of velvet, engaged in a quarrel. Greene steps between them and asks them to explain the cause of their fight. Velvet Breeches insists that he is superior to Cloth Breeches, but Cloth Breeches retorts that there is no difference between them "but in the cost and making" and both are "but a case for the buttockes, and a couer for the basest part of mans body" (223). Cloth Breeches goes on to claim that he represents the yeomanry and the ancient gentlemen of England, whereas Velvet Breeches, he claims, belong only to "unmannerly upstarts." Velvet Breeches in return claims to be of Roman ancestry and that he was called into England to honor young Gentlemen and Nobility. Cloth Breeches accuses Velvet Breeches of employing "glosing phrase" but promises to overcome it despite Cloth Breeche's self-pronounced "bad Rethoricke" (224-225). The two employ Greene to help settle their dispute to determine which is "most ancient and most worthy" of claiming residence in England. Most of the remaining text consists of a process of selecting jurors of various trade backgrounds. Cloth Breeches and Velvet Breeches bring up objections against various individuals

serving on the jury due to their potential inherent bias against himself or towards his opponents.

At first appearances, *A Quip* seems primarily to be a commentary upon social class and a satire of would be social climbers, and indeed it does function in that fashion. However, a closer look at the text reveals a more sophisticated debate between humanist ideology and economic self-interest emerging, albeit in an incomplete form, with Clothe Breeches representing the former and Velvet Breeches representing the latter. Clothe Breeches continually presents himself as having a concern for the common weal whereas Velvet Breeches is positioned as being concerned about individual self-interest and pride. Their exchange on the purpose and function of education demonstrates this point aptly. Velvet Breeches argues that improving one's economic and social status is the end of all things, including education:

I cannot but greeue that I should bee thus outfacst with a Carters weede onley fit for husbandry, seeing as I am the original of all honorable endeuours: to what end dooth youth bestor their witts on Lawe, Physick, or Theologie, were it not the end they aime at, is the wearing of me and wining of preferment? Honor norisheth Art, and for the regarde of dignity, doo learned men striue to exceede in their faculty. (229)

Here Velvet Breeches presents wit as literally a type of capital to be invested in order to reap an expected return. He goes on to offer himself as the motivator of all trade and ends his argument by stating that "the world is chaunged and men are growne to more witte, and their minds to aspire after moore honorable thoughts" (229). "Honorable thoughts" in this passage is a euphemism for aspiring to a higher social position, and

there is an ironic contrast between his high-minded phrasing and the underlying references towards material acquisition. Clothe Breeches responds to this argument with a recognizable humanistic argument:

Whereas you affirm your selfe to be both original and final end of learning, alas proud princox you preach a bowe to hie: did all the Philosophers beat their braines, and busie their wits to wear Veluet Brecheses? Why both at that time thou wert vnknowne, yea vnborne, and all exesse in apparell had in high contempt, and nowe in these daies al men of worth, are taught by reading, that excesse is a great sin, that pride is the first step to the downefall of shame. They study with Tully, that they may seeme borne for their countryes as well as for themselues. The Diuine to preach the Gospell: the Lawier to reforme wronges and maintaine justice, the Phisition to discouer the secretes of Gods woonders, by working strange cures: to bee breefe, the end of all being, is to knowe God, and not as you worship good masiter Veluet Brecheses wrests, to creep into adquaintance. . . . I hope there is none so simple, but knowes that handicraftes and occupations grew for necessity, not pride: that mens inuentions waxed sharpe to profite the common wealth, not to pranke vp themselues to brauery. (232)

In contrast to Velvet Breeches, Clothe Breeches presents the purpose and nature of wit and its employment for the betterment of the commonwealth. He even goes so far as to present manual trades ("handicrafts") as serving to better the commonwealth, a sentiment that recalls Ascham's lament that "many good wits" were lost due to Englishmen buying

imported goods rather than relying on ones crafted at home.⁷ From the very beginning, Greene makes it very clear that he is on the side of Clothe Breeches. Even the introductory epistle speaks in the name of Clothe Breeches and in defense of his argument. Contrastingly, Velvet Breeches is continuously associated with an assortment of vices from pride to vanity and greed.

However, the simple dichotomy of the investment of wit towards either socio-economic self-interest or the aim of bettering the society as a whole is quickly complicated. When observing the world of tradesmen, Clothe Breeches is forced to admit:

Indeed I cannot denie, but your worship hath brought in deceit as a journey man into all companies, & made that a subtil craft, which while I was holden in esteeme was but a simple misterie: now euey trade hath his sleighes, to slubber vp his worke to the eie, and to make it goode to the sale, howsoeuer it prooues in the wearing. (248)

But as the narrative progresses, it reveals that there are more than a few "sleights" among the tradesmen, and Clothe Breeches ends up rejecting many of the potential jurors because their economic interests position them as more sympathetic to Velvet Breeches. Clothe Breeches complains that the tailor makes more from velvet clothing than plain cloth, and the barber more from fancy foreign haircuts and mustaches than English ones. Similarly, he argues that the doctor and the apothecary see Velvet Breeches more often and proclaims, "I make my wife my Doctor and my garden my Apoticaries shop" (243). These arguments directly contradict Clothe Breeches earlier claims about the higher minded "final ends of learning." Moreover, as the narrative advances, it becomes

⁷ For a discussion of Ascham's attitudes towards consumption, see Chapter II, page 30.

obvious that it is not simply that Clothe Breeches objects to the concept of economic self-interest. Quite contrarily, he ends up appealing primarily to his own economic interest groups. Most of the professions end up divided and positioned as either benefiting more economically from Clothe Breeches or Velvet Breeches.⁸ Thus the sharp contrast between the two that is set up at the narrative's opening collapses into a world of competing economic interests.

When it comes to discussing the literary marketplace's allegiance to Cloth Breeches or Velvet Breeches, the text remains ambivalent. Velvet Breeches abstains from objecting to the printer serving on the jury because he is ten pounds in his debt. Clothe Breeches also abstains, but admonishes the printer slightly since "some of his trade will print lewd bookes, and bawdy pamphlets, but *Auri sacra fames quid non?*"⁹ (271). Thus Clothe Breeches accepts the printing of "lewd books" as almost an inevitable fact of economic life. Regarding their attitudes towards poet, again, both Clothe Breeches and Velvet Breeches have little to say for or against him. Clothe Breeches characterizes the modern poet as a "waste good and an unthrift, born to make the Taverne rich" and proceeds to characterize him as a spendthrift: "Ten pounds a supper, why it is nothing if his plow goes and his inkhorne be cleere" (291). These references are the first step towards Greene's repentance pamphlets, where he will later personalize such vices as

⁸One of the few trades that is positioned as entirely virtuous abstaining from economic self-interest is the Knight, whom Velvet Breches complains should not be on the jury since he "raiseth no rent, racketh no lands, taketh no incombs, imposeth no mercillesse fines, enuies not others, buyeth no house ouer his neighbours head, but respecteth his country and the comoidty therefore, as deere as his life" (267). The heavy handed satire in this passage makes it easy to overlook the more sophisticated cultural critique. The knight is described as an "honest ancient English gentlemen" (266) who "although his landes & reuenewes be great, . . . yet he is content with home spun cloth" (267).

⁹This is an echo of a famous passage from Virgil's *Aeneid* (*Quid non mortalia pectora cogis, auri sacra fames?* 3:56-57), which Theodore Williams translates as "O, whither at thy will, curst greed of gold, may mortal hearts be driven?" Clothe Breeche's citation of Latin here is yet more evidence of his association with the early humanist perspective.

drinking and spend thriftiness as indicative of his own moral failing. But here Clothe Breeches is ultimately gentler in his judgment and argues that the poet is "an honest man" if only "he would learn to live within his means" (291). Velvet Breeches, for his part, rejects the poet because he "will think Gentlemen are beholden to him if he bestows a kind word on them" (291). What is left altogether unreferenced is the humanist concept of duty to the commonwealth, a concept so prominently displayed earlier in the text. While Clothe Breeches occasionally argues that other trades have a duty to the commonwealth that they either do or do not uphold, he does not mention such an obligation in relation to the book sellers or the poet. Whether or not Greene intends it to be so, *A Quip* ultimately serves as a lesson in how competing economic interests subsume almost all other concerns.

The blurring of the dichotomy between Velvet Breeches and Clothe Breeches anticipates a similar pairing between Roberto and his father in Greene's *Groatsworth of Wit* (1592).¹⁰ Like Velvet Breeches, Gorinus, the father, argues that self-interest and material possessions are the end of all things. He is described as an "userer" and an "old new made gentlemen," a description that would put him in the same social climbing position that *Upstart* is largely designed to satirize (105). Gorinus claims that the world should run on clearly defined economic principles. He sarcastically remarks that death is "witlesse, and knows not what good my gold may do for him. . . . I think he hath with this

¹⁰ It should be noted that Greene's authorship of *Groatsworth of Wit* is contested. The text was published in 1592 by Henry Chettle, after Greene died earlier the same year. There is significant evidence that some of the material in the pamphlet is Greene's and some of it was added by his publisher, Henry Chettle. For an argument in favor of *Groatsworth* being a partial forgery, see John Jowett's "Henry Chettle: 'Your Old Compositor.'" In it, Jowett discusses a computer analysis by W. B. Austin and concludes that "the pamphlet almost certainly contains some Chettle and some Greene" (147). However most of Greene's critics work under the assumption that most of ideas in *Groatsworth of Wit* originated in some form with Greene himself. For example, Alexandra Halasz argues, "whether or not Greene wrote the pamphlet is incidental to the pamphlet's representation of Greene and the impasse of authority which at which he arrives" (120).

foole my eldest sonne beene brought vp in the vniuersitie, and therefore accounts that in riches is no vertue" (105). When Roberto returns home from the University, Gorinus throws a great feaste at which Roberto chastises his father and other men at the table for being "excrable usurers." Afterwards, Roberto goes to his father to ask forgiveness for his "liberall speech, seeing what he uttered was truth" (107). Gorinus, to Roberto's surprise, comically replies that he wishes Roberto to keep giving his speeches against his trade, since "if thou canst perswade any of my neighbours from lending vppon vsurie, I should haue the more customers" (107). When Gorinus dies, he leaves the majority of his wealth to his other son, leaving Roberto, whom he describes as the "well red brother," with only a single groat with which, he sneers, "I wish him to buy a groasworth of wit: for he in my life hath reprooued my maner of life, and therefore at my death, shall not be contaminated with corrupt gaine" (106). Thus, once again, at the narrative's opening, humanist education is placed on one side of an opposition and self-interest and economic gain is placed on the other.

But as in *Upstart*, the dichotomy between these two concepts does not remain pure. Roberto immediately sets out to trick his brother out of his money. He attempts to dupe him by introducing him to a prostitute who, according to plan, is to marry his brother and then split the wealth with Roberto. However, the plan backfires when she decides to keep the money for herself. Roberto then meets an actor who tells him that men of his profession "get by schollers their whole liuing" (131). The man continues:

I was a countrie Author, passing at a morall, for it was I that pende the Moral of mans wit, the Dialogue of Diues, and for seauen yeers space was absolute interpreter of puppets. But now my Almanacke is out of date.

The people make no estimation,
Of Morrals teaching education. (132)

In this passage, Greene describes the literary London scene in overtly cynical terms. The playwright admits to parasitically relying on scholars, but then becoming used up and out of fashion himself. Wit and morality are presented here as disposable commodities which the general reading public, i.e. "the people" do not really value. The social commentary provided by the playwright is reaffirmed in the subsequent biography of Roberto whose own career reenacts the same cycle in full and both the player's career and Roberto's play directly as allusions to Greene's own life. To this end, D. Allen Carroll demonstrates many of the ways Roberto's actions relate directly to Greene's own biography and argues that one of the primary motives behind Greene's work involves the patron-playwright scene and the way it may indicate Greene's "resentment at having to write for the common players at all, mixed with a pride at doing it better than they" (306).¹¹ But it is of particular relevance that Greene chooses to largely frame his resentful attack on his purported inferiors as a renunciation of the extravagant abuses of wit by players and playwrights. As Kathleen McLuskie points out, "Plays, together with the commercial trade in books, afforded an opportunity for the unlearned to appear learned, removing the controls on the trade in learning which a closed patronage system would have imposed" (56). Thus, Greene's renunciation of playwrights as abusers of wit and his direct association of this group with various vices serve as attempts to reclaim cultural capital.

¹¹ Carroll also notes that "Moral of mans wit" and "Dialogue of the Diues" are probably references to lost plays. But, as he indicates, the reference to these and other plays in this section "seems intended to reflect not the experience of any specific individual but rather the dramatic activity in general of the seventies and early eighties" (303).

The rejection of players and playwrights is just one final link in a narrative chain that consistently associates the abuse of wit with a pursuit of money. When Greene renounces his youthful behavior at the end of the work, it can be read as Roberto's literal conversion from his father's usurious activities to a true Christian redemption: "let this my last worke, witness against [my other works] with me, how I detest them. Blacke is the remembrance of my blacke works, blacker than night, blacker then death, blacker then hell" (139). The emphatic repetition of "blacke" is obviously referring to the taint of sin, but the association between the author and Roberto and Roberto and his father's usury racializes the language by process of association. The text opens by associating a manipulation of wit with Jewishness and ends with a renunciation of this activity in the form of a Christian apology, essentially mirroring the trajectory established in Lyly's *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit*, which ends with a defense of Christianity as the one true religion.

However, we should pay close attention to the particular language that *Groatesworth* uses to associate the abuse of wit and economic success with a group of supposedly undeserving playwrights. In the second half of *Groatesworth*, Greene breaks the fourth wall and reveals that the story of Roberto has indeed been his story all along and that he now wishes to speak directly to his readers to offer them what wit he can to make up for his own misspending of wit. In this section, Greene comments overtly and directly on the conditions of the literary marketplace and goes so far as to attack Shakespeare specifically. In what is perhaps the most well-known and often quoted section of the text, he describes Shakespeare as a social climbing player who does not deserve the fame he has acquired: "Yes, trust [the Players] not: for there is an vpstart

Crow, beautified with our feathers, . . . with his Tygers heart wrapt in a Players hide" (144). However, Greene does not stop at merely insinuating that players turned writers like Shakespeare are upstart hacks. He goes on to infer that truly deserving writers cannot find success in the public marketplace and that this fact indicates that they are wasting intellectual capacity; they are spending their wit, a valuable commodity, and getting nothing in return:

[Shakespeare]¹² supposes he is as weel able to bumbast out a blanke verse as the best of you: and being an absolute Iohannes fac totum, is in his own conceit the onely Shake-scene in the countrie. O that I might intreat your rare wits to be employed in more profitable courses: & let those Apes imitate your past excellence and never more acquaint them with your admired inuentions. I know the best husband of you all will neuer proue a Userer, and the kindest of them all will neuer prooue a kinde nurse: yet whilst you may, seek you better Maisters; for it is pittie men of such rare wits, should be subject to the pleasures of such rude groomes. (144)

That Greene uses the phrase "rare wits" twice in as many sentences is indicative of the way the language of commerce dominates the conception of wit in this passage. The commodity of true wit is presented as scarce and therefore automatically more valuable. More significantly, it is difficult to determine whether Greene's use of the phrase "profitable courses" is supposed to be indicative of literal monetary profits or something of more abstract cultural benefit. The distinction between these two ideas has been collapsed. When Greene uses the phrase "profitable endeavor" in the advice he offers to

¹² While Greene never invokes Shakespeare by name, it is widely accepted that "upstart crow" is referring to him. The fact that Greene refers to a player turned author and puns off of terms "Shakes-scene" serve fairly clear references (144).

"rare wits," the humanist conception of civic virtue comes head to a head with the material realities of the literary marketplace. On one hand, regardless of how self-aggrandizing his ideas about profitable reading may be, Greene is promoting a belief that literature can and should be of value. On the other hand, he rejects the literary marketplace as a waste of "rare" wit's energies because it has betrayed his conception of value by not legitimating it economically. The argument echoes Pierce's lament in Nashe's *Pierce Pennilesse* that wit is not valued as it should be.

This positioning of wit, it must be remembered, is part and parcel of Greene's own attempt to position himself in the marketplace. A number of critics have gone so far as to read Greene's later renunciation of his work as little more than a marketing device, but this reading is the overdetermined effect of failing to recognize the way Greene's later works often blur the distinction altogether between market demand and humanist literary value; Greene's renunciation pamphlets do not present the two as being as sharply antagonistic as they may first appear. *Greene's Vision* (1592) provides another good example of this phenomenon. Initially, *Greene's Vision* sets up the same initial stark contrast between humanist wit and marketplace demand as in the aforementioned texts. In *Vision*, this dichotomy takes the form of another dream narrative, one in which Greene is engaged in a conversation with Chaucer and Gower about the value of his own work. The text opens with Greene's "ode, of the vanities of wanton writings," in which he laments, "Tis shame and sin for pregnant wits / To spend their skill in wanton fits," a refrain which is repeated later in the poem. This observation leads Greene to contemplation of his own work and of the purpose of the intellect, which he presents as divine quality. He elaborates,

. . . I mean come from the heauens, & was a thing infused into man from God, the abuse wereof I found to be as prejudicial as the right vser therof was profitable, that it ought to be employed to wit, [not] in painting out a goddesse, but in setting out the prizes of God: not in discovering of beauty but in discovering of vertues (202)

This rhetoric harks back to that of Elyot and Ascham, presenting wit and intellect as divine attributes to be employed for the facilitation of virtue. Greene laments that his own work has not met these standards in a passage that seems to double as both a marketing of his earlier work and a recantation of it. As Arul Kumaran observes, "in the first few pages of *Vision*, Greene presents an unflattering picture of himself as a writer of trivial pamphlets, a picture whose authenticity is severely undercut by irony" (257). Kumaran argues that the precise descriptions Greene uses in his earlier works "become more attractive than the didactic message they are supposed to convey to readers" (260) and provide examples of how discussions of these texts implicitly serve as a marketing device for these earlier works.¹³

But the merit of Greene's earlier text becomes a weightier topic of exploration in *Visions* than the winking *mea culpa* in the text's opening section may first imply. After Greene purportedly falls asleep in bed, he dreams of a conversation between himself, Geoffrey Chaucer, and John Gower. The dream conversation picks up where his waking thoughts left off with the two authors presenting their own thoughts on the value of Greene's publications. Chaucer speaks for the values of poetic license in the marketplace based on demand, whereas Gower is metonymic for the humanist conception of wit and

¹³ For more on the way Greene's repentance texts can be seen as marketing devices for his earlier work, see Kumaran 258-263.

literary value. When Greene complains that he has "set fourth sundrie bookes in print of loue & such amourous fancies" (212) Chaucer responds by describing the nature of literature in a way that deconstructs Greene's simplistic dismissal of his earlier work:

Why Greene, quoth he, knowest though not that the waters that flow from Parnassus' fount are not tied to any particular operation, that there are nine muses, amongst whom as there is a Clio to write grave matters, so there is a Thalys to indite pleasant conceits, and that Apollo hath bays for them both, as well to crown the one for her wonton amours as to honour the other for her worthy labors . . . some deeply conceited to set out matters of great import, others sharp-witted to discover pleasant fantasies. (214)

Chaucer argues that "it behooves a Scholler to fit his Pen to the time and persons, and to enter with a deepe insight into the humours of men, and win them by such writings as best will content their fancies" (224). To "win" an audience over by "content[ing] their fancies" is to admit to the pragmatics of the marketplace and consumer demand. Chaucer continues to privilege "fancies" in this manner throughout his defense of Greene's work.

Like Chaucer's argument, Gower's response also appeals heavily to antiquity. He proclaims that "[i]n elder time . . . they which considered that man was born to profit his country sought how to apply their time and bend their wits to attain perfection of learning, not to inveigle youth with amors, but to incite to virtuous labors" (12). He argues,

Therefore, Greene, take this of me, as thou has written many fond works, so from henceforth attempt nothing but of worth; let not thy pen stoop so low as vanity, nor thy wit be so far abused to paint out any precepts of

fancy, but fly higher with the hobby . . . do nothing but worthy thy wit and thy learning. (32)

Thus both authors make an appeal to wit as a key part of their arguments. Chaucer takes up the notion of wit associated with "pleasant fancies" and courtly romances (or as he refers to them, "effeminate amours") that comprise Greene's early career. Gower in response appeals to the concept of wit as inherited from the early humanist tradition. Greene accepts Gower's argument and recants his former work, but near the end of the work another character appears who subverts the arguments of both Chaucer and Gower. King Solomon enters the conversation and warns Greene that if he follows Gower's advice he is "resolving to continue in vanitie" (277). He argues that "all artes, all learning except Theologie, be meere foolishnesse and vanitie" and therefore encourages Greene, "applye thy wits onely to diuinitie" (280). Once more Greene has essentially blurred a distinction that he initially set up as a clear contrast. As Jeremy Dimmick points out, "With Solomon's extraordinary intervention, Greene ends by flattening out all the hierarchies of discursive kinds that his Gower has spent such energies constructing: all are equally vain" (517). Moreover, Greene ends the work by promising his audience "as you had the blossoms of my wanton fancies, so you shall have the fruits of my better labours" (36) This statement also works at collapsing the distinction since "the flowers" of his "wanton fancies" are described as leading to the anticipated "fruits" of his future labors and therefore portrayed as part of the same process.

Alexandra Halasz argues that the literary position Greene inhabits in his later texts like *Groatsworth* and *Vision*, that of "the disgraced poet," is "but one pole of an oscillation in which he imagines himself caught between 'wanton works' and 'effectual

labors' and from which he cannot extricate himself" (34). However, the reason he is unable to find a path out of this cycle is neither, as some of the aforementioned critics have suggested, that Greene simply finds himself unable to live up to his literary promises nor that he is merely using this posture repeatedly as a cynical marketing ploy. Rather the problem, as Halasz points out, is one not unique to Green, but rather indicative of "the impasse between the discursive authority learned men and poets claim or desire and the demands of the marketplace" (38). In Greene's particular case, however, his inability to find a suitable resolution for the creation of more worthwhile texts is manifested in the persistent way he has collapsed the distinctions between the humanist conception of wit and the economic marketplace. In his earlier text, this process manifests itself in an aestheticizing of wit, a reduction of its usage to the game of courtship as manifest in the popular Euphuistic romances of the period. In his later texts, this same problem manifests itself through a continual collapsing of the humanist conception of applying wit for the betterment of the commonwealth with concerns over economic gain. Whether or not Greene's later texts reveal a sincerely penitent wit, they are clearly never able to establish a belief in wit's divinity that transcends the conditions of economic realities.

CHAPTER VI

LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST'S INDIFFERENT WIT

Introduction

Love's Labour's Lost has long been considered one of Shakespeare's most challenging works by critics and general audiences alike. Eighteenth-century critics often discussed the play in dismissive terms. In 1710, Charles Gildon referred to it as "the very worst" of Shakespeare's plays (45), and Samuel Johnson similarly condemned it as a play that "all the editors have concurred to censure and some have rejected as unworthy of our poet" (52). As Henry Woudhuysen points out, the play appears to have gone unperformed for nearly two hundred years, making it the only Shakespearean play without a staged production for the entirety of the eighteenth century (90). In the last century and half, the play has been more warmly received, but even modern critics continue to debate the play's thematic focus and its purported tonal inconsistencies. For example, Cynthia Lewis opens her exploration of the play by pointing out a disparity between an early speech by Rosalind wherein she describes Berowne's wit as producing "mirth moving jests" and "sweet and voluable discourse" (2.1.76) and her complaint near the end of the play that, even before she met Berowne, she knew of his reputation as a man "complete with mocks" and "wounding flouts" that are aimed at all who "lie within the mercy of [his] wit" (5.2.831-834). Lewis concludes, "The wit that is clearly described as salutary in the first passage has turned hurtful in the second" (246). Kristian Smidt goes even further in his discussion of these sorts of disparities and argues that "Shakespeare began *Love's Labour's Lost* in a mood of romance and finished it in a predominantly satirical mood" (205). Similar issues cause Oscar Campbell to surmise

that "[n]o satisfactory reason has been given for the unique and indeterminate ending of the drama" (93). The fact that many critics have focused on the pair of songs at the end of the play as an interpretive keystone only further indicates how unsatisfying many find the play's dramatic conclusion.

However, at the same time that the play has been criticized and puzzled over for these and other inconsistencies,¹ it has also regularly been referred to as Shakespeare's most witty play. Indeed, the observation could be literalized. Woudhuysen calculates that "[t]here are more uses of 'wit' and its derivatives in *Love's Labour's Lost* than in any other of Shakespeare's works" (40). C. L. Barber similarly concludes that *Love's Labour's Lost* "is particularly dependent on wit and particularly conscious in the way it uses and talks about it" (155). While many critics have discussed the central conflict of the play in terms of the men's overuse of witty language and the women's rejection of it, and while others have commented on the play's relationship to early humanist culture, none have fully explored how the play's commentary on wit connects these issues. For example, in his discussion of the play Barber simply defines wit as "language that gives us something for nothing; unsuspected relations between worlds [that] prove to be ready at hand to make a meaning that serves us" (155). James Calderwood describes a central tension of the play as involving "the intercourse between wit and words," but he identifies the former only as "procreative and vital, generating through mirth and amusement a community of feelings" (59). A similar point could be made about numerous critics who discuss the satire of humanist culture. While some have identified

¹ Some of the other inconsistencies that have been discussed by critics include the play's misappropriation of various female characters' lines in the quarto and folio edition, the somewhat ambiguous relationship between the end of the play and the ending song, and the underdeveloped nature of the play's subplots. For more on the play's critical reception and the various controversies surrounding it, see Woudhuysen 70-74.

relationships between the satire of pedantry in the play and sixteenth-century humanist thought, few have attempted to map the associations between the satire of humanist thought and the satire of wit displayed in the men's writing and speech.

In short, as with the other authors I have examined, the scholarly discussions of the play's relationship to contemporary debates about wit in the late sixteenth century remain underdeveloped. As I have attempted to demonstrate, the concept of wit in the sixteenth century is not merely indicative of a particular type of wordplay or even a simple aesthetic evaluation. Rather, the term carries with it ideological implications inherited from the early humanist writers, and its usage in the last few decades of the sixteenth century is often directly related to arguments about the cultural and economic value of texts in the newly emerging literary markets. As I will argue in this chapter, *Love's Labour's Lost* can also be positioned as part of the discourse on wit, since the play acknowledges and satirizes both humanist wit and marketplace conceptions of wit and portrays both as part of a singular cultural continuum, one that establishes a consistent narrative thread that ties together its various components and establishes a tonal consistency throughout the play.

Examining the overall structure of *Love's Labour's Lost* reveals the degree to which cultural and political debates about wit lie at the center of both its main plot and subplots. The play opens with the king and three of his noblemen, Longaville, Dumaine, and Berowne, swearing vows to turn the Navarrese court into "a little academe" where they will spend three years engaged in study, forgoing carnal pleasures for the sake of intellectual enlightenment. The justification for rejecting carnal pleasures, as Longaville argues, is that "Fat paunches have lean pates, and dainty bits / Make rich the ribs but

bankrupt quite the wits" (1.1.26-27). Thus material consumption and intellectual consumption are positioned as mutually exclusive aims at the very opening of the play. Among the rules Navarre's men establish to facilitate the nourishment of their wits are that they are not to see women during their three years of study and that no women are to be allowed in the court lest they serve as distractions. Berowne puts up a brief protest by claiming that more knowledge is to be gained through love and through an engagement with the sensual world than through bookish study, but eventually even he reluctantly agrees to the vow. Shortly thereafter, the Princess of France and her small entourage of women arrive at court to settle a dispute over a debt owed by her father. In order to maintain some dedication to their vows, Navarre's men meet the princess's entourage in a park some distance from the court. However, the king's men immediately fall in love with the ladies and each clandestinely writes romantic letters to the lady of his choosing. Eventually, they are betrayed to one another and come up with a new plan to collectively woo the women disguised as Muscovites so as to still escape at least the appearance of having forsworn their vows. The women become aware of the plan and reject the men's attempt, but accept the gift each man brings. Later the men return in their own dress, but the women don disguises and swap the gifts to thwart the men's attempt at wooing once more. After the trick is revealed, the men then have a pageant acted before the company in yet another effort to charm the women by juxtaposing their own wits with an inferior stage production. As Berowne tells the King, "We are shame-proof, my lord; and tis some policy / To have one show worse than the King's and his company" (5.2.507-508). However, at the end of the performance, before the men have a chance to continue their attempt at courtship by demonstrating how much more impressive they are than their

chosen players, a messenger arrives telling the princess that her father has died and she announces that she must return to France immediately. The men make one last attempt to gain the promise of courtship, but they are once more rebuffed. The play ends with the women's promise to return in a year's time given that the men improve their behavior and learn how to court more earnestly.

There are also two subplots, both of which are far less complex than the main narrative thread. The first involves the courtier Don Armado, a braggadocio who falls in love with a country maid, Jaquenetta, and attempts to woo her by writing her a comically pedantic love letter. The second, much looser plot involves a pair of scholars: Holofernese and Nathaniel. In the first scene in which they appear, they represent no forward moving action, but merely serve to comment upon the ignorance of those around them. Later on they are commissioned along with Armado to put on the aforementioned bad production, the Nine Worthy's performance, for the royal company. Their play, as predicted by Berowne, ends up being ridiculed by the king and his men, and they are subsequently humiliated.

But these seemingly compartmentalized conflicts each centers on the topic of wit. The King's men breaking their vows to dedicate their lives to study and their movement towards the composition of love poetry reenacts the very transition from humanist wit to courtly wit manifested in Lyly, ridiculed by Nashe, and recanted by Greene. The subplot with Don Armado mirrors this shift from classroom to court in a more exaggerated fashion, since the romantic rhetoric he employs is even more hyperbolic and yet at the same time stands as a direct reflection of scholarly pedantry. Holofernes and Nathaniel's discourses similarly serve both as direct parodies of humanist wit and as commentary on

its disconnection from reality. Examining these aspects in more detail, we can begin to see how the satire of wit establishes a consistent perspective throughout and how the play ultimately remains indifferent towards debates about wit as it deconstructs the very concept of wit that it relies on for much of its comic energy.

Satirical Wit

The most obvious satire of wit occurs in the portrayal of the protestations of love by the King, his noblemen, and Armado. When the princess asks her ladies in waiting what they have heard about the King's men, wit is at the center of each of their answers. Longaville is described by Maria as "a sharp wit matched with too blunt a will" (2.1.49). Katherine praises Dumaine as having "wit to make an ill shape good, / And shape to win grace though he had no wit" (2.1.59-60). And Rosaline talks at length of Berowne's wit:

His eye begets occasions for his wit,
 For every object that the one doth catch
 The other turns to a mirth-moving jest,
 Which his fair tongue, conceit's expositor,
 Delivers in such apt and gracious words
 That aged ears play truant at his tales,
 And younger hearings are quite ravished,
 So sweet and voluable is his discourse. (2.1.64-76)

In response to these answers the princess coyly remarks, " Are they all in love / That every one her own hath garnished / With such bedecking ornaments of praise?" (2.1.77-79). Yet despite the princess's teasing, none of these descriptions of wit are unqualifiedly positive. Maria's description of Longaville's "sharp wit" implies caustic

critique. Katherine's portrayal of Dumaine's ability to make "ill shapes good" connotes deceit. And Rosaline's characterization of Berowne's ability to turn everything into "mirth-moving jests" that make "aged ears play truant" hints at triviality and shallowness. Thus, even though the women adorn the men with praise at the play's opening, there is already an inherent skepticism about wit embedded in each of their speeches.

When the men and women meet in the park, the game of courtship that the men attempt to engage in is constantly sabotaged as the ladies deconstruct and evade their witty rhetoric. The initial encounter between Rosalind and Berowne serves as a good example:

Berowne: Did not I dance with you in Brabant once?

Rosaline: Did not I dance with you in Brabant once?

Berowne: I know you did.

Rosaline: How needless it was then

To ask the question?

Berowne: You must not be so quick.

Rosaline: 'Tis long of you that spur me with such questions.

Berowne: Your wit's too hot, it speeds too fast, 'twill tire.

Rosaline: Not till it leave the rider in the mire.

Berowne: What time o'day?

Rosaline: The hour that fools should ask.

Berowne: Now fair befall your mask!

Rosaline: Fair fall the face it covers!

Berowne: And send you many lovers!

Rosaline: Amen, so you be none.

Berowne: Nay, then, will I be gone. (2.1.113-125)

This exchange captures much of the rhetorical tone of the men's attempt to converse with the ladies. Indeed this is so much the case that Harold Bloom posits that "[d]id not I dance with you at Brabant once?" would almost have been an equally apt and charming title (124). The comic backstory of the line is that both its delivery and Rosalind's mimicry of it indicate that "Don't I know you from somewhere?" was already an outdated and overused pickup line four hundred years ago. But more importantly, this passage as a whole demonstrates the general dynamic of nearly every exchange between the men and the women. Here, Rosalind uses the metaphor of bucking a rider to describe her attempt to throw Berowne from his attempt to woo her. In other words, she is employing her own wit as a means of "throwing" Berowne's. Later in the play the princess describes this same strategy succinctly as "sport by sport overthrown" (5.2.153). Time and again the men employ their wit for the purposes of wooing. The women, conversely, employ theirs to deconstruct and upturn the men's rhetoric of courtship, which they see as trite and hyperbolic.

To this end, many critics have characterized the moral or the lesson of the play as movement away from the artificial speech of the male characters and towards the "russet yeas and honest kersey noes" promised by Berowne near the play's end (5.2.413). For example, James Calderwood argues that the early scenes in the play establish "the fact that language so divorced from reality of human nature can achieve little more than merely verbal triumphs, let alone foster an enduring social order" (61). Anne Barton characterizes the wit of the ladies as having "a certain edge of reality, an uncompromising

logic, which cuts through the pleasant webs of artifice, the courtly jests and elaborations in the humor of the men, and merges victorious with an unfailing regularity" (131).

Catharine McLay similarly observes, "both main and sub-plots deal with the movement of the play from the artificial to the natural, from illusion to reality, from folly to wisdom" (221). Louis Montrose even goes so far as to argue that this movement is a meta-theatrical one:

When Berowne and the King acknowledge the illusiveness of their fanciful world of wit in explicitly dramatic terminology, the world of Navarre is now recognized as a playground bounded by a world outside; the larger context of actuality within the fiction is itself implicitly associated with the world of the theatre audience. (543)

Time and again, the critical discourse surrounding the play presents the men as representing a world of artificiality and the women as representing the intrusion of an external reality.

However, there is some irony in characterizing the men's speech habits as not "real," because their manner of speaking is largely a direct reflection of the popular speech and writing during the period. William Carroll points out that the "probable dates for *Love's Labour's Lost*, c. 1593-97, coincides with the height and waning of the Elizabethan craze for 'Petrarchan' sonnets and sonnet sequences" (*The Great Feast of Language* 102), and this exact type of language characterizes the men's professions of love, especially in the sonnets they compose. Similarly, as Carroll also points out, the pedantic speech of Holofernes, Nathaniel, and Armado mirror stylistic attributes of other popular writers during the period. For example, as Carroll observes, Armado's letter to Jaquenetta

demonstrates a highly latinized manner of speaking with frequent employment of pleonastic pairs reminiscent of the one employed by Lyly in the two *Euphues* novels of the previous decade (34). Moreover, Carroll is far from the only critic to make this comparison. Walter Pater is one of the earliest critics to make an extended association between Lyly and Shakespeare. Pater argues that the play demonstrates that the Euphuism "had some fascination for the young Shakspere [*sic*] himself" (67). Oscar Campbell similarly writes, "The dialogue has been thought to be in every way an approximation to that developed by Lyly, and the spirit and tone of the social life of the courtly ladies and gentlemen as depicted by both writers to be identical" (83). John Pendergast argues that Shakespeare intends to parody Lyly by emphasizing "a vernacularized Latin" (51). While few of these critics venture so far as to offer particular passages up for comparison, presenting Lyly as the forerunner to Shakespeare's witty prose has become a common observation among critics of the play.

In fact, many scholars have even made direct associations between various characters' manner of speaking and specific Renaissance figures. Francis Yates argues that Armado's and Holofernes's manner of speaking share traits of the writings of John Florio. Along the same lines, numerous critics have made associations between Thomas Nashe and Moth. John Pendergast generalizes that the interplay of various linguistic registers demonstrates that "the medieval economic and cultural stratification was no longer in place, and [that] through LLL Shakespeare was presenting his audience with what that new world was beginning to look like" (53). In other words, Pendergast is proposing that the various character's modes of speech are a direct reflection of the social mobility of the late sixteenth century. Obviously what many critics are attempting to

describe by characterizing the men's speech as not "real" is the same thing we often mean in modern parlance when we refer to marketing language as not real; even though the language may be ubiquitous, it relies heavily on hyperbole and does not accurately describe the underlying object or phenomenon to which it supposedly points.

Shakespeare was aware of the way in which this sort of exaggeratory language was part of marketplace forces in his own period. This awareness is indicated by the tremendous number of references to the literary marketplace in relation to "witty" speech and writing throughout the play. For example, Navarre refers to Armado as "a man in all the world's new fashion planted, / That hath a mint of phrases in his brain" (1.1.162-163). Berowne similarly characterizes Armado as "A man of fire-new words, fashion's own knight" (69). Both of these descriptions recall Ascham's association with newfangled phrases and clothing.² However, they push further into the territory of overt economic association by employing the concepts of "minting" phrases and creating "fire-new" words, concepts which allude to the idea of crafting words and phrases into saleable commodities. As Woudhuysen observes, "The mint's iterative work supplies a potent image for the copiousness, the inexhaustibility of language—new words can always be coined and new ideas always created—but it also warns against inflation, which devalues coins and language, rendering words worthless" (32). Armado's own words betray this dilemma of "word inflation" and even reference it overtly. Alone on the stage after admitting his love for Jaquenetta, he exclaims, "Assist me, some extemporal god of rhyme, for I am sure I shall turn sonnet. Devise, wit, write, pen; for I am whole volumes in folio" (2.1.148-151). It is significant that in this passage wit is used synonymously to

² For a discussion of Ascham's association between new fashioned words and new fashioned clothing, see Chapter II, pages 37-39.

describe the process of composition and that the act of composing a love poem is then subsequently folded into the act of producing "whole volumes in folio." For Armado, expressions of wit, love and the processes of literary production are so strongly associated that the latter becomes a ready-made metaphor for both of the former and vice versa.

However, the play's characterization of Armado is just one example of associations between this type of exaggeratory witty discourse and literary production. The entire play seems highly concerned with the sheer volume of wit being put on display and virtually all of this commentary sufficiently doubles as commentary on the literary marketplace. One of the princess's primary complaints about the love letter she receives from the king is that it is "as much love in rhyme / As would be *crammed up in a sheet of paper*, / Writ o' both sides the leaf, margin and all" (5.2.6-8, italics added). Rosalind wryly remarks, "I am compared to twenty thousand fairs" (5.2.37). Maria complains, "This letter is too long by half a mile" (5.2.54). In describing her own letter, Katherine refers to it as "Some thousand verses of a faithful lover. / A huge translation of hypocrisy / Vilely compiled, profound simplicity" (5.2.50-53). Summing up the entire group of King's men Rosaline grumbles, "Well-liking wits they have: gross, gross; fat fat" (5.2.268). The latter two remarks by Katherine and Rosaline go beyond merely alluding to an overabundance of wit in the marketplace; they carry with them overt associations between the production of wit and saleable goods. Katherine's description of "a huge translation of hypocrisy . . . vilely compiled " is a reference to the many Latin to English translations of classical texts, many of which were often presented in disorganized compilations with poor or no authorial attribution. Her complaint here

makes reference to the same type of texts that Nashe's *Pierce Pennilesse* describes as leading "poor Latinless authors" to a point of confusion, since they "no sooner spy a new ballad, and his name to it that compiled it, but they put him in for one of the learned men of our time" (92). Rosaline's description of the men's wit as "gross" and "fat" meanwhile carries a double meaning. It is not only a reference to the volume of wit on display in the men's speech and writing. It is also, as Woudhuysen points out, a reference to animals grown to full size and "ready for market" (150), the implication thus being that the men's wit is ready to be taken to market for slaughter.

The most overt association between wit and the marketplace comes from Berowne's critique of Boyet, the princess's attendant. Addressing the king and the rest of his men just after Boyet leaves the stage, Berowne laments,

This fellow pecks up wit as pigeons peas,
 And utters it again when God doth please.
 He is wit's pedlar, and retails his wares
 At wakes and wassails, meetings, markets, fairs:
 And we that sell by gross, the Lord doth know,
 Have not the grace to grace it with such show. (5.2.315-320)

Berowne's comparison of retailing wit versus selling it "by the gross" (wholesale) indicates that the one who markets wit and "retails his wares" can afford to be opportunistic. However, if Boyet represents the writer in the marketplace who has an unfair advantage in his ability to customize his presentations of wit for particular occasions and to leisurely polish his words in the meantime, i.e. "the grace to grace it with such show," then it is worth pondering who Berowne and the rest of the King's

men—men who have to "sell [wit] by the gross,"—are in this metaphorical comparison. One answer is to view this passage as a potentially meta-theatrical moment in a play that is famous for its meta-theatricality.³ We can read this passage as having a second meaning beyond that of positioning Boyet in competition with the men for the women's favor, one wherein the actor playing Berowne is referring to himself and the king's men as literal players on the stage and therefore as metonymic of the position of theatrical production in comparison to literary production. Unlike one who produces for the literary marketplace, "wit's pedlar," one who produce for the theater has to perpetually turn out new presentations of wit for theatrical production, thus "selling by the gross." Such a reading would also fit thematically with Berowne's character, since he is consistently portrayed as one of Shakespeare's most self-conscious characters and is the one responsible for overtly breaking the fourth wall at the end of the play by announcing that it is not ending the way that it should.⁴

The opposition of playwrights and book writers in these sorts of terms was not uncommon. It is worth recalling that, as discussed in the last chapter, Greene's *Groatsworth of Wit* portrayed the playwright whom his protagonist meets as a player turned playwright, one who brags, "men of my profession get by schollers their whole living" and states that he can "serue to make a prettie speech, for [he] was a countrie Author" (132). Later in *Groatsworth*, the referents become much more specifically

³ For a discussion of the meta-theatrical elements in *Love's Labour's Lost*, see Keir Elam's *Shakespeare's Universe of Discourse*. Elam unpacks the many meta-referential language games throughout the play. For example, he argues that "Navarre's park is only very sketchily characterized as a scenic point of reference, and serves, more often than not, as a kind of textual *locus ludicer*, the pseudo-spatial grounds for the more pressing adventures in the anaphoric space of the co-text" (93). He thus concludes that "[e]ven relatively straight forward spatial references offered in apparent good faith are deflected from their course and robbed of their content" (93).

⁴ For a more in depth discussion of Berowne's self-consciousness, see William Carroll's *Love's Labour's Lost: A Modern Perspective*, 261-265.

aimed at Shakespeare when Greene compels his fellow "rare wits" to no longer allow themselves to be taken advantage of and calls out Shakespeare specifically as "an upstart crow, beautified with our feathers, . . . an absolute Johannes fac totum who supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blanke verse as the best of you" (144). Kristian Smidt has argued that earlier lines in the play of Berowne's—"Small have continual plodders ever won, / Save base authority from other's books" (1.1.86-86)—demonstrate Shakespeare's "having a fling at the university wits" and notes that *Groatesworth* could indeed have been "itching in [Shakespeare's] feathers at the same time as composing *Love's Labour's Lost*" (208), since the estimated dating of the play would locate it within a few years of *Groatesworth's* publication. However, Berowne's speech presents commentary that could be read as an even more direct response. Without going so far as to argue that Shakespeare's play as a whole is a response to Greene's criticism of him, it is at least easy to position Berowne's speech as an antithesis to Greene's complaint. Greene, who was notorious amongst his contemporaries as the wittiest writer in the period, complains in *Groatesworth* about the ease with which players turned writers could borrow heavily from phrasing of the best wits of the period and profit from the labor of other's wits. Berowne offers a succinct response to that charge: that "wits" like Greene can publish as infrequently as they please and have many venues in which to sell their wares whereas the playwright has only the theatre.

Moreover, this passage is not the only one wherein Boyet is overtly associated with the book trade. After Boyet praises the princess at the beginning of act 2, she chastises Boyet and compares him to a "chapmen," a marketplace peddler:

Beauty is bought by the judgment of the eye,
 Not uttered by the base sale of chapmen's tongue.
 I am less proud to hear you tell my worth
 Than you much willing to be counted wise
 In spending your wits in praise of mine. (2.1.15-19)

Here the phrase "spending your wits" is turned towards book peddlers rather than toward the act of playwriting as in *Groatsworth*, but as in Greene the association is still a negative one. The "honey-tongued" and "chapmen's tongue" are one and the same. The princess argues that praise coming from the bookstall is automatically devalued, "made base" by being contextualized within the book trade. As Carla Mazzio deduces, "The absurdity of 'loving by the book' is a recurrent trope in Shakespearean comedy, where humanist and courtly models of engagement meet, clash, and generally result in lost labour of love" (191). Here, however, the trope is more fully realized in the positioning of Boyet as a peddler of wit's wares, and the marketplace associations in Berowne's and the princess's speeches both present him as opportunistic and cheapens the value of his wit. As Dull unwittingly puts it in responding to Holofernes and Nathaniel's verbal play, a "pollution holds in the exchange" (4.2.50) when wit is presented in the marketplace.

Continuous Wit

However, to say that *Love's Labour's Lost* satirizes marketplace wit is not to say that it sides with arguments against the abuse of wit such as those championed by Nashe early in his career and Greene in his later renunciation pamphlets. Admittedly, on the surface the play does seem to harbor some sympathies toward these views. The vow to dedicate their lives to study that Navarre's men take at the opening of the play may seem

like evidence to this end. As referenced above, Longaville defends the decision to spend three years in pursuit of study, and his argument for the value of this plan entails perspective on wit that appears to have much in common with the early humanists. He declares that "Fat paunches have lean pates, and dainty bits / Make rich the ribs but bankrupt quite the wits" (1.1.26-27). Dumaine's vow functions similarly when he swears, "To love, to wealth, to pomp, I pine and die, / With all these living in philosophy" (1.1.31-32). These passages establish a binary of scholarly study that stands in opposition to a courtly culture with its consumption, material gain, and ostentatious display. But there is also a significant amount of satire to be mined in the men's plan to turn Navarre into a "little academe," as numerous critics have pointed out. First, Navarre's plan is extreme enough in its division of scholarship from the rest of the world that it functions as a sort of overt parody of humanist ideals. Louise Montrose argues, for example, that Navarre's court is a satire of the function of humanist wit, since "[a]t the court of Navarre, the practice of rhetoric is cut off from its ethical and political foundations" (547). Montrose claims that the play as a whole reflects a disenfranchisement with humanist rhetoric, one that results from a realization that the English monarchy "persisted as an autocratic structure of neofeudal chivalry and preferment" (546-547). This argument aligns with many other critics who often characterize a group of writers of the 1590s as "malcontents" frustrated with the outcomes of the humanist enterprise and their inability to gain high positions of power despite their educational accomplishments.⁵

⁵ For a broader discussion of disenfranchisement with humanist thought in the last few decades of the sixteenth century, see Ellinghausen 37-52.

However, we need abstract the discussion as part of a larger cultural critique the way Montrose does to realize that Navarre's motivation for study seems highly self-serving or that hermetically sealing off the court from the outside world seems like a catastrophic way to approach governance. As Anne Barton notes while comparing the King's plan in *Love's Labour's Lost* to Angelo's in *Measure for Measure*, "[t]he scheme of justice which Angelo would enforce in Vienna is as ridiculously inflexible, as ignorant of the nature of human beings as Navarre's Academe. . . ." (128). The subplot involving the king's punishment of Costard for his infidelities with Jaquenetta, while not as harsh as the punishments devised by Angelo, also seem to indicate an inflexible approach to governance. Moreover, when Navarre announces "Let fame, that all hunt after in their lives, / Live register'd upon our brazen tomb / And then grace us in the disgrace of death" (1.1.1-3), it serves to foreshadow the hubris put on display by the men throughout the majority of the play. As Carroll notes, "[t]he rhetoric [in Navarre's speech] anticipates the over-confident plan for the Academy, otherwise a respected institution, which Navarre proceeds to offer. His self-assurance is also brazen, but he will soon learn the caprices of fame himself" ("Introduction" 22). When we examine the rhetoric and the rules surrounding Navarre's "little academe," the plan Navarre's men devise is revealed as less than completely flattering.

There is also a sharp satire of humanist's misogynistic tendencies in the rules Navarre's court proposes. The play draws particular attention to the harsh rule that women are banned from coming within a mile of court on penalty of having their tongues removed. When Longaville admits that he was the one who devised the penalty Berowne cries, "Sweet lord, why?" and follows up with the humorously understated note that

cutting off women's tongues is a "dangerous law against gentility" (1.1.125-127). The attack upon women as wicked and leading men away from virtuous pursuit bears resemblance to the one found in Nashe's *Anatomy of Abuse*. As discussed in Chapter IV, the misogynic aspects of Nashe's text is a side effect of its attempt to attack what Nashe sees as a flood of foolish love poetry and romances, texts which purportedly divert the reading public's attention away from works exhibiting true scholarly wit.⁶ The fierce penalty for women found at court proposed by Longaville has a similar focus on preventing Navarre's men from going astray in their academic pursuits. However, it is so harsh to serve as overt satire, and the fact that the women constantly outsmart the men provides an ironic commentary on the men's attempt to pursue wisdom by banning women from the Navarrean court.

Even the title of the play can be viewed as ironic commentary since it bears a fairly direct reference to a passage from John Florio's *First Fruits* (1578), one which strengthens the association between arguments about the literary marketplace such as Nashe's in *Anatomy of Abuses* and with *Love's Labour's Lost* satire of these arguments. In *First Fruits*, Florio writes, ". . . nowe adayes you shal finde, that wheras one loueth honestly, a hundred loue dishonestly. . . . We need not speak so much of loue, al books are ful of loue, with so many authours, that it were labour lost to speak of Loue" (S3). Thus the title for *Love's Labour's Lost* appears to be a fairly direct reference to Florio's condemnation of the overabundance of texts about love in the literary marketplace, not only because the phrasing in Florio's book is very similar to Shakespeare's titling of his play, but also because the theme of love presented "dishonestly" in books is a dominant trope throughout the play, as the previous discussion of marketplace associations indicate.

⁶ For more on Nashe's *Anatomy of Absurdity* see Chapter IV, pages 93-97.

But in Shakespeare's play, unlike in Nashe and Florio, the position is not taken with complete seriousness. For example, when the king describes their plan of study,

Berowne mocks the court's entire enterprise:

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-searched with saucy looks;
 Small have continual plodders ever won,
 Save base authority from others' books. (1.1.80-87)

Here Berowne inverts Florio's argument that there is no point in studying love and argues instead that it is the only subject worth studying.

The satire of this position is even more apparent in the fact that all of Navarre's other men who chastise Berowne and vow to live up to their high minded humanist pursuit of study shortly find themselves forswearing their vows and composing the most clichéd of love poetry. A short exchange between Dumaine and Berowne in act 4 serves as a succinct example of the mockery that Navarre's serious enterprise is reduced to later in the play:

Dumaine: Once more I'll read an ode that I had writ.

Berowne: Once more I'll mark how love can vary wit. (4.3.91-92)

That all the men become foolish sonneteers and hypocritical about keeping their vows is perhaps the notable way Navarre's court and its platitudes are satirized. The princess

refers to the king and his entourage as "Navarre and his bookmen" (2.1.226) and all of the ladies characterize the men as having abundant wit. But this labeling serves as a double referent: they are bookmen in that they claim to pursue scholarship and they are bookmen in that their trite expressions of love reflect the literature which dominates the marketplace. In short, the play does not allow its "bookmen" the dignity to maintain the binary of poet-scholars of humanist wit and marketplace hacks who abuse it, the binary that Nashe and Greene attempt to appeal to at various points in their career.

Nevertheless, each of Navarre's men does try to keep up appearances while secretly writing sonnets to the lady of his choosing. In one of the most brilliant scenes of the play, the king and each of his men subsequently comes onto the stage alone, reads the love sonnet he composed, and hides in the bushes only to see the next do the same. After the last man reads his sonnet, the order is reversed as each previous man subsequently comes out of the bushes and hypocritically chastises the one before him for not living up to their promised vow. The first on stage and last to be exposed is Berowne, who is betrayed by the letter he sent being returned after being sent to Jaquenetta by mistake. As Carla Mazzio points out, the scene virtually stages the very phenomenon of the purported "scandal of print":

The rhetoric and the phenomenon of inadvertent publication in early print culture, where writers claimed to be embarrassed by the unauthorized publication of their work, might well be taken to inform the many scenes of textual circulation on the Shakespearean stage, where letters and poems are stolen, decontextualized, recontextualized, and commercialized within the domain of both play and theatre. (201)

It is thus ironic that three of the men's bad Petrarchan imitations went on to be lifted from Shakespeare's play and reprinted without his permission in larger collections completely removed from their original context. As Carroll observes, these sonnets may have been republished as legitimate love poems, but that does nothing to remove their satiric edge in the play:

The love-sonnets of the four noblemen may have been anthology-favorites of the day, but the context of the play repeatedly demonstrates their limitations. We hear the same complaints, even from those who write the poems, over and over again: the poems are too hyperbolic, too exaggerated. They make flesh a deity, they are idolatrous, and they are only imitations. They are precisely what self-deceived academics of the day would probably be writing and depending on an uncritical infatuation with the machinery of Petrarchanism. The noblemen are not poets, but poetasters. (*The Great Feast of Language* 116)

Carroll points out that the fact that the poems were anthologized only demonstrates satirical mastery, and "how Shakespeare has captured the clichéd tropes and wearisome sentiments of the stereotypical 'lovers'" (*The Great Feast of Language* 181). Thus the play's presentation of the men's development from humanist scholars to bad sonneteers mirrors the same shift that is exemplified in Nashe's and Greene's complaints about wit in the marketplace. But Shakespeare demonstrates no favoritism or defense of one side of the debate or the other, but rather portrays them as two sides in one. The princess offers a succinct history of the development:

None are so surely caught, when they are caught,
 As wit turned fool. Folly in wisdom hatched
 Hath wisdom's warrant and the help of school,
 And wit's own grace to grace a learned fool. (5.2.72)

Indifferent Wit

As discussed in the previous three chapters, there was a significant economic motivation that partially shaped each of those writer's conceptions of wit. Lyly, in writing *Euphues and his England*, catered more directly to the court audience with whom his first text had gained popularity, and as a result his texts transition from a satire of courtly wit to an embracing of it. Nashe and Greene meanwhile, at different stages in their career, attempted to appeal to the concept of humanist wit as a way to gain a cultural and economic capital which would set them apart in the marketplace. Part of the explanation for Shakespeare's presentation of wit in *Love's Labour's Lost* may perhaps be similarly explained by his own position in the literary market. *Love's Labour's Lost* was the first of his plays to be printed in an official quarto edition, the title page of which prominently read "Newly corrected and augmented by W. Shakespeare." Additionally, as David Bevington explains, "[b]y that time Shakespeare may have been in London for a decade or so, gaining steadily in reputation as a dramatist" (5). Shakespeare does not seem to have any reason to be economically invested in arguments surrounding humanist wit and the humanist conception of the value of literature the way Lyly, Nashe, and Greene did.

Another partial explanation for *Love's Labour's Lost's* seemingly anomalous perspective on wit may be found by comparing the cultural position of "university wits"

such as Lyly, Nashe, and Greene to that of Shakespeare. Stephen Greenblatt hypothesizes just such a comparison in *Will in the World*:

Shakespeare may have sensed a snobbish assumption of superiority on the part of the university wits; it would be surprising if they did not look down upon him and surprising if he did not perceive it. He did not contribute commendatory verse to any of the books that they published in the late 1580s and early '90s. No doubt he was not asked to do so. He, in turn, did not likely solicit for himself any commendation of the kind they routinely wrote for one another. None in any case appeared. He did not enter into their literary controversies, just as he seems to have been kept—or kept himself—outside their raucous social circle. This is, after all, a man who soon went on to manage the affairs of his playing company, to write steadily (not to mention brilliantly) for more than two decades, to accumulate and keep a great deal of money, to stay out of prison, and to avoid ruinous lawsuits, to invest in agricultural land and in London property, to purchase one of the finest houses in the town where he was born, and to retire to that town in his late forties. (209)

Love's Labour's Lost is perhaps one exception to the idea that Shakespeare "did not enter into their literary controversies," though it clearly comments on the debate about wit with an external perspective. In comparison, the university wits by and large felt the social and intellectual pressures that compelled them towards the ideas of civic virtue and they wrestled with attempts to manifest these ideas in their own writing and to justify their own worth and the worth of their university education. Their conception of true wits and

abusers of wit are largely the result of an attempt to claim cultural capital to this end. Shakespeare, meanwhile, seemingly never felt this sort of pressure and its absence is reflected in the lack of tension in the way *Love's Labour's Lost* explores the value of wit.

There is something Romantic about the idea of an author of Shakespeare's ability putting all his talent for expressing wit and the debates surrounding it on display only to dispel its luster and then walk away. But of course that is not what happened, as William Carroll observes. Comparing the play's language usage with the type promoted by Francis Bacon (1561-1626), a major influence on modern scientific language, Carroll argues,

It is tempting to conclude, as we now generally share Bacon's materialism, that at the end of *Love's Labour's Lost* Shakespeare, with Berowne, forswears "taffeta phrases" and "silken terms." That this is simply not so is evident in the continuing use of such phrases in the rest of the play—indeed, in the rest of his plays. (*The Great Feast of Language* 62)

While Carroll is correct that much of Shakespeare's subsequent work could be described as continuing to revel in an employment of "taffeta phrases," Carroll conflates conclusions with subsequent acts of *savoir faire* when he implies that sharing a Baconian perspective on language or thought and writing "taffeta phrases" are mutually exclusive possibilities. Ultimately, we live our lives largely according to the truths of the economic and cultural realities that surround us rather than only according to the ideological truths we discover. Even a man who has been historically rendered as large as Shakespeare is no different in this regard; he just seems less conflicted about the process than do many of his contemporaries and perhaps more than many of us.

Nevertheless, if we examine Shakespeare's plays closely, we can indeed witness sites of contention that potentially reveal the writer's struggle between the tastes of his audience and his rejection of such constraint. But Shakespeare often found the middle ground. In discussing the evolution of *Hamlet* from its earlier quarto edition to the later folio one, James Shapiro hypothesizes,

In allowing his writing to take him where it would in his first draft, Shakespeare had created his greatest protagonist, but the trajectory of Hamlet's soliloquies had left the resolution of the play incoherent and broken too radically from the conventions of the revenge plot that had swept both protagonist and play to a satisfying conclusion. (312)

Shapiro argues that Shakespeare addressed this problem in the later version of the play by reigning in Hamlet's soliloquies and reducing the role of Fortinbras as Hamlet's foil. He argues that "[w]hen Shakespeare saw that he had to wrest his play from where Hamlet had led him, he did so unflinchingly" (319). The ending of *Love's Labour's Lost* displays a similar awareness of audience expectations. Berowne speaks directly to these concerns when he laments, "Our wooing doth not end like an old play: / Jack hath not Jill. These ladies' courtesy / Might well have made our sport a comedy" (5.2.842-864). But ending the play "as comedy" would require disrupting the entire integrity of the play, which seemingly has nowhere left to go dramatically or argumentatively. The cultural value of both humanist and marketplace conceptions of wit have been thoroughly deconstructed.

The play's seemingly inconclusive conclusion is the result of its central tension, one wherein, as Carla Mazzio defines it, "idealist conceptions of text clash again and again with materialist conceptions of the physical book in the social world" (203).

Another way of framing this interaction is to say that humanism and its conception of literary value clashes with marketplace conceptions of value. This "clash" is manifested here and elsewhere as a debate about the nature and function of wit and the final exchange between the men and the women in the play serves as a good summation of where Shakespeare's play falls in the debate. After all their efforts to demonstrate their wit, the King's men seem exasperated that the women are immune to their dazzlingly verbal displays. Dumaine protests, "Our letters, madam, showed much more than jests" (5.2.758) Rosaline quietly responds, "We did not quote them so" (5.2.759). The exchange serves as much a referendum on value of the humanist rhetorical tradition and marketplace presentations of eloquent wit as it does on the men's specific behavior since the men are presented as little more than an a representative embodiment of the form. *Love's Labour's Lost* as a whole seems indifferent towards arguments that want to stake larger claims on the value of wit and the debates about literary value that often accompanied them. In modern discussions about the value of studying canonical literature, Shakespeare and his work are often positioned at the forefront. His work represents for many the apex of sophisticated verbal play and literary value, concepts that in the late sixteenth century were heavily associated with the concept of wit. *Love's Labour's Lost*, above all others, is the play in which Shakespeare devoted the most energy into analyzing the concept of wit. But when we attempt to uncover what the play has to say about wit's value, it seems to stare back at us and wonder why we quote it so.

CHAPTER VII
SUBSUMING WIT

The tendency towards secularity and economic determinism extends far beyond the territory of professional writers in the early modern period, as has been observed by numerous social critics. In *A Social History of Art*, Arnold Hauser provocatively claims that the movement from medieval to Renaissance culture is a movement from ideologically based societies (feudalistic; Christian) to materially based societies (capitalistic; mercantilist). He pays particular attention to the cultural shifts occurring in twelfth-century Florence: the rise of the burgeoning Florentine middle class to power and the deals made between this class, who have all the economic resources, and the old aristocracy, who have the traditional cultural prestige. The "rights" of citizens in such a society, he explains, are based upon guild rights. The predominant change that occurs in this early capitalist period in Italy is described by Hauser as follows:

It was not the principle of expediency in itself that was new in the economic life of the Renaissance, nor the mere readiness to give up traditional methods of production . . . but the consistency with which tradition was sacrificed to rationality and the truthlessness with which all the resources of economic life were put to practical use and turned into an item in the ledger. (24)

This process of economic reductionism, he argues, becomes the guiding principle in middle class virtue, but it soon dissipates. When the new middle class gains the sought after economic security, their predominant sense of virtue shifts to aggrandizements of leisure and beauty. Thus the middle class becomes more like nobility at the same time

that nobility has to become more economically practical and more like the formerly business minded bourgeois. Karl Marx employs the phrase subsumption to describe this process by which capitalism gradually shapes all other social and cultural processes to its own end.

An argument similar to Hauser's and Marx's could be applied as a descriptor to what is occurring in England during the last few decades of the sixteenth century in regards to the humanist conception of wit. The earlier humanist writers were writing from a position of relative privilege and their notions of literary aesthetics and literary value were thus uncompromised by their economic positions. As was noted in the first chapter, writers such as Erasmus, Thomas Elyot, and Roger Ascham did not depend upon their writing as their primary source of income. They thus have a relationship to literature and the literary market that is far different than the first generation of professional writers that followed a half a century later. Wit for them was a divine trait, one intimately bound up in arguments about the value of education to facilitate civic virtue and societal governance. Yet wit was subject to a similar set of forces that Hauser locates within the gentry. Many of the ambassadors of wit in the second half of the sixteenth century—writers such as Lyly, Greene, Nashe and Shakespeare—drive the concept towards secularity.

In Lyly, this secularization is manifest in *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit* through the deconstruction of the relationship between eloquent rhetoric and virtuous action. In *Euphues and his England*, it is demonstrated through a recantation of the life devoted to the mind in favor of a paratextual and narrative embrace of romance motifs. Nashe's secularization is demonstrated in his movement away from a heavily didactic positioning

of the function and value of wit towards his bargaining with wit in the marketplace in order to gain social and economic capital. Greene's use of wit is secularized as a means to collapse the distinction between consumer demand and humanist interests. Finally, in Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost*, humanist and marketplace presentations of wit are presented as two sides of the same coin and the play remains indifferent, or at least agnostic, towards the ultimate value of wit. In the latter half of the sixteenth-century humanist wit is not allowed to maintain its exclusive status as a divine trait of "them that be governors," as Elyot once wrote (46). By the end of the sixteenth century, it is literally being put to work in the economic sphere and in the processes it is gradually emptied of many of its former ideological implications.

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