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“His ignorance were wise”: Gendered Knowledge in *Love’s Labour’s Lost* (1594/95)

Abstract: *William Shakespeare’s satirical romantic comedy presents a characteristic dramatic staging of the contest between an institutionally stabilized factual or academic knowledge and social know-how (‘wit’). The essay traces how gender relations shift significantly when seemingly fixed bodies of knowledge become temporarily unreliable. Against the historical background of ‘mother nature’ being cast in increasingly scientific terms and a general gendering of a) the practice of scientific observation as male and b) of the object of scientific observation as female, the reading presented here clarifies how women in the play shake up the male, factual knowledge of a court academy, turning it into the procedural knowledge game of courtly love. Thus, they turn themselves from objects into subjects of the knowledge discourse. The play’s choreography of discrepant awareness emerges as a specific formal device deployed to involve both the play and its contemporary recipients in the knowledge debates of their time. While awareness implies sovereignty and power, the play stages and finally suspends its inversion of a gendered episteme, postponing it to Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale*.*

1 Theatre and Knowledge

Within the realm of literature, knowledge is addressed particularly strongly in drama. This is due to the fact that drama is closely connected to the medium of theatre,¹ where knowledge is not only described and discussed but staged before an audience and embodied by living actors. Knowledge in drama/theatre is therefore not only a content, but a process the dramatic characters (as well as the audience) are situated in according to their varying degrees of awareness of what is going on.² Theatre brings to mind one of the main differentiations within the semantics of knowledge – that between propositional knowledge (knowledge of ‘what’) and procedural

1 For theatre as medium and its relation to literature (another medium), cf. Merten, *Intermediales Text-Theater*.

2 Cf. Daniel Schäbler in this volume.

knowledge (knowledge of ‘how’) (cf. Ryle). At the same time, by ‘processing’ knowledge, i.e. by embedding it in actions that involve individuals, their social relations and hierarchies, theatre also stages, in the sense that it both represents and analyses, the politics of knowledge, i.e. the power relations involved in and expressed by knowledge.³ Theatre is one of the prime media of knowledge – both of its joy and its terrors,⁴ both of its human necessity and its painful power politics. Theatre stages these politics, but it also analyses and unravels them. This is the interest of my article.

My focus will be on gender, because within the field of power knowledge, gender is particularly common as a knowledge that will shape, organize, and suppress human individuals and their bodies. At the same time, gender knowledge is in several ways central to the history of Western theatre, because acting entails the representation and negotiation of the (costumed) body on stage as well as its gender performance. The gendered body is particularly strong in comedy, the theatrical genre addressed in this article. Comedy, among other things, engages in human sexuality, for example, by connecting sex with the advantages and the disadvantages of different levels of knowledge about other human beings and their bodies. In satirical comedy, characters will use their knowledge against other characters and for their own (and the audiences’) amusement, both by exposing to ridicule the academic ignorance and social incompetence of pretenders and by using their own knowledge to ‘know’ other characters sexually. On a less aggressive note, in romantic comedy some characters remain funnily but also touchingly unaware of their own love for another human being and his or her body.

My example, William Shakespeare’s comedy *Love’s Labour’s Lost* (1594/95), is in many ways both a satirical and a romantic comedy. The play abundantly features the staging and analysis of knowledge (power), not just because it is, according to Katherine Eggert, “Shakespeare’s most explicit portrayal of the scene of knowledge making” (193), but also because it was written in a time of particularly strong historical shifts in

3 Cf. the introduction and Ann Spangenberg’s article in this volume on the discursive nature of knowledge as explored by Michel Foucault and other post-structuralists.

4 On the terrors of knowledge in tragic *anagnorisis*, cf. Bishop (33–36).

knowledge, as we shall see, and not least about gender. The connection of factual (academic) knowledge and social know-how ('wit') is typical of early modern satirical comedy. What is unique about *Love's Labour's Lost*, however, is its shift from the initial discursive stability of knowledge to the precariousness of social practice and ultimately the 'death' of knowledge. *Love's Labour's Lost* shows how seemingly set and stabilized knowledge can at first become socially and performatively 'shaky' before grinding to a halt altogether. This negotiative and epistemic quality of *Love's Labour's Lost* and particularly its gender dimension has not yet been noticed: women in the play shake up the male, factual knowledge of a court academy, turning it into the procedural knowledge game of courtly love and thus turn themselves from objects into subjects of the knowledge discourse.

2 Establishing a Male Knowledge Order in *Love's Labour's Lost*

Love's Labour's Lost concerns itself with knowledge almost from the beginning. The scene is set at the court of Navarre. Three courtiers enter in conversation with the King who makes the following proposal:

Our court shall be a little academe,
Still and contemplative in living art.
You three, Berowne, Dumaine and Longaville,
Have sworn for three years' term to live with me,
My fellow-scholars [...] (1.1.13–17)⁵

The "statutes" (1.1.17) of this academy are regular fasting, voluntary sleep deprivation, and (hetero)sexual abstinence, all in order to enable study maximization over the period of three years to which the academy is limited.⁶ The last commandment in particular raises comments among the courtiers, and Berowne is especially keen to re-introduce women into the curriculum of the men's knowledge project, saying he will "study where to

5 References are to the Third Arden Edition, ed. H.R. Woudhuysen.

6 The context of early modern court academies (and of courts as the precursors of modern academies) has been extensively studied, with respect to both Shakespeare and to the history of knowledge in a more general sense, cf. Yates (*A Study; French Academies*) and Moran. However, no systematic reading of 'knowledge' in *Love's Labour's Lost* has so far been undertaken.

meet some mistress fine” (1.1.63). What might be seen as a sly reversal of the King’s epistemic endeavor through the use of academic language against its expressed purposes (or, for that matter, as a lame joke⁷), has actually been convincingly read as an in-depth analysis of the Navarrian knowledge discourse: “[Berowne] suggests that desire for books or desire for ‘some mistress fine’ are in fact interchangeable objects of desire [...] The original opposition between abstract knowledge and corporeal knowledge has been dissolved” (Breitenberg 438).

And so, as soon as the four men meet the Princess of France and her three attending ladies, the principal female characters of the play, they immediately write love sonnets about them to both document and express their ‘knowledge’ of women. Far from halting their academy project, these poems implement it in full; in the play, “Petrarchism [is] a representation of woman-as-the-Other that seeks a form of ‘knowledge’ about her that always already remains elusive” (Breitenberg 435).⁸ Breitenberg subsequently analyses a structure of obsessively and constitutionally deferred male gratification in *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, which comprises sexual objects just as much as it does objects of study. For him, this structure is ultimately based on the unattainability of the real outside language and thus represents the basic cultural law of patriarchy. While I agree with the main thrust of this argument, I suggest refocusing the perspective somewhat, taking the history and the politics of knowledge into account. The male academy is not distracted by Berowne’s suggestion and the courtiers’ subsequent courtly love activities, as many critics have contended.⁹ Instead, following Breitenberg,

7 Cf. “From women’s eyes this doctrine I derive: / They sparkle still the right Promethean fire; / They are the books, the arts, the academes, / That show, contain and nourish all the world” (4.3.324–326). To take this parallelism seriously analytically and thus to deliver the play from a shadow that might otherwise have hung over it, its perceived atmosphere of ‘old boys off-colour jocularity,’ so to speak, was one of the starting points for this article.

8 Cf. Schalkwyk on Petrarchism’s construction of silent women and Erickson (69) on Berowne’s captivity in the “closed linguistic system” of Petrarchism.

9 Krippendorff contends that the “patriarchalisches Wissen einer Gender-blinden Wissenschaft” (‘patriarchal knowledge of a science that is blind to gender’) in *Love’s Labour’s Lost* is in need of a female principle for completion (98). I do not see this science as gender-blind at all. Quite the opposite: male knowledge already emphatically and constitutively *includes* the female and therefore does

the interest in women must be seen as a constitutive element of the academy. By studying and writing about women, it realizes one of its goals; in a sense, the love sonnets are its proceedings.¹⁰ Seen from another angle, ruling out women and studying women are not opposites, but structural equivalents because both betray a desire to control them by way of objectification.¹¹

By looking at the history of knowledge in the early modern period more generally, this reading can be strengthened and connected to other epistemic control projects of the period. Even if gender differences were not as strict as in the 18th and 19th centuries (Outram 801–10; Honegger), women were routinely seen and conceptualized as needing male control, simply because their sexuality was regarded by many men as comparable to their own (male) sexuality (Outram 801; Maclean). A significant body of work, therefore, advocated that they be socially controlled, whereas the *discursive* control of women had not yet been implemented to the extent it was from the 18th century onward. Science, however, was already strongly gendered in the 17th century, and this gendering began to change at the time. This was due to a shift in the conception of nature, that was no longer seen as a nurturing mother but as “a female to be controlled and dissected through experiment” (Merchant 190) as advocated by Francis Bacon and René Descartes. Concomitant with this scientification of ‘mother nature’ was a general gendering of scientific practice, “with the [object] gendered as female and [the observer], inevitably, as male” (Outram 810). In this sense, the academy in *Love's Labour's Lost*, far from excluding women from their curriculum, studies nothing *but* women.

This scientification of nature also considerably changed the epistemic status of the miracle. Whereas miracles were seen well into the 16th century as

not need to be expanded by a female principle but countered by a new *form* of knowledge.

- 10 Cf. Breitenberg: “women and male desire for them become the condition of all knowledge” (442); Cf. Peter Sloterdijk’s latest novel (2016) for a contemporary take on this.
- 11 Cf. Mazzio (204). Turner argues that the compensatory quality of the academy is meant to provide an outlet for violent military competitiveness through a knowledge rivalry (22).

expressions of God's power creating the world and 'wonder'¹² and hence welcomed as adequate responses to the metaphysical and therefore inexplicable origins of nature, from the 17th century onwards, miracles were regarded more and more skeptically. Again, Bacon was at the forefront of the movement, demanding that instead of blissfully proclaiming the miraculous, man needed to discover the "essential but often hidden workings of nature" so that "the properties and qualities of those things, which may be deemed miracles [...] of nature, be reduced to, and comprehended in, some form or certain law" (Bacon qtd. in Daston 111). In the same context, a lack of knowledge, or 'ignorance,' was no longer seen as a pious, modest, and ultimately enabling condition, as, for example, in Nicholas of Cusa's *Docta Ignorantia* (1440) in the 15th century. Instead, ignorance was now condemned as a lapsarian state which it was the duty of the responsible believer to leave behind (Beyer 27; Meier-Öser). Nature was no longer a nurturing female to be venerated and admired in ignorance, she was to be scientifically found out and exploited fully.

Therefore, when Shakespeare in *Love's Labour's Lost* has Berowne use all the epistemic buzzwords of the period to describe his 'love,' the men's academic sonnets' project is deliberately marked as 'modern.'

If *knowledge* be the mark, to know thee shall suffice:
Well learned is that tongue, that well can thee commend,
 All *ignorant* that soul, that sees thee without *wonder*;
 Which is to me some praise, that I thy parts *admire*. (4.2.111–14; emphasis added)

Again, Berowne suggests that the academy fully realizes itself in the study of women, a knowledge that is represented by the very poem recited at this moment. In accordance with contemporary episteme, the supersession of ignorance is implied in the court's modern knowledge project, not only here but several times in the course of the play.¹³ The discourse of wonder/miracle is duly conjured up – with an interesting twist, however. On the one hand, Berowne's "to know thee shall suffice" typically expresses the epistemic objectification of women as explored, and the

12 Interestingly, the English word 'wonder' both denotes the phenomenon and the human reaction to it.

13 Ignorance is called a "monster" in 4.2.22. As will be shown in the following pages, the women return the academy to the ignorance it struggles to overcome.

“wonder” claimed to be necessary for this knowledge could be seen as simply incorporating the earlier response to the world into the new culture of epistemic exploitation. On the other hand, there is also a critique of male objectification behind Berowne’s call (back) to wonder and admiration, which reminds the men of the limitations that all their new-found knowledge will have, just because these limitations have never been overcome. The questioning and deconstruction of the male academy, however, is undertaken mainly by the female characters, as we will see in the next section of this article.

3 From the Academy to Wit: The Female Mobilization of Knowledge

Following the first encounter of the courtiers with the French ladies in 2.1, the atmosphere suddenly changes. Whereas the ‘academic’ exchanges of the courtiers in Act One, with the exception of Berowne’s interjections (which on inspection also prove affirmative rather than subversive), were measured and statutory, the female characters speed up, mobilize, and question knowledge right away:

KING

Hear me, dear lady: I have sworn an oath.

PRINCESS

Our lady help my lord! He’ll be forsworn.

KING

Not for the world, fair madam, by my will.

PRINCESS

Why, will shall break it; will and nothing else.

KING

Your ladyship is ignorant what it is.

PRINCESS

Were my lord so, his ignorance were wise,
Where now his knowledge must prove ignorance. (2.1.97–103)

The Princess immediately sets about attacking the male academic project and its celibate rationale, both by twisting the King’s words in decontextualizing repetitions (“lady”/“Lady,” “will”/“will”) and by using epistemic vocabulary herself (“ignorance,” “wise,” “knowledge”) in order to both counteract the male episteme and to claim her own. The women have set out to disturb the male academic project (which includes their objectification) and they proceed

to do so by transferring male academic speech into a new, much faster, more dialogic, and stichomythic context. However, at the same time it becomes clear that, far from merely destroying existing knowledge, it is their intention to give it a new, mobile, and performative, shape: the stabilizing and objectifying academic male knowledge about women must be turned, as the Princess puts it, into a “civil war of wits” (2.1.225) *between* men and women.¹⁴

‘Wit,’ I contend, is a term denoting a procedural alternative to the factual knowledge of the academy. By making ‘wit’¹⁵ out of knowledge, the women transform the academic and Petrarchian *discourse* into a social *practice*.¹⁶ This becomes especially clear in Act 5 as the Princess and her ladies receive the sonnets written about – and now also addressed to – them. Complaining about the overwhelming, fixating, and deadening quality of this stabilizing discourse,¹⁷ they decide to outwit its senders. Again, their project (as yet unspecified) is characterized as a ‘witty’ female counter-episteme that takes up, mobilizes, and reverses the language of male knowledge:

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. (5.2.69–72; emphasis added)

‘Wit’ will reverse ‘wisdom,’ turning it into ‘folly’ and the ‘scholastic’ “bookmen” (2.1.226) into living paradoxes – ‘learned fools’ whose “knowledge,”

14 Cf. Turner for the competitiveness of early modern courtly love (games) and the female part therein, both in *Love’s Labour’s Lost* and elsewhere (32–36).

15 ‘Wit’ denotes both a mental quality and a particular kind of person. Both meanings are present in “civil war of wits.” However, according to Zucker the former meaning is the more basic, particularly in early modern comedy (3–11). What is more, the English ‘wit’ (a quality) and the German ‘Wissen’ share the same root.

16 According to standard discourse theory, practice is of course part and parcel of discourse, not an alternative to it. Note, however, Bhabha’s witty notion that, in the case of the ‘nation’ at least, discourse is inevitably undermined by the sheer fact that it needs to be performed, i.e. practiced, to become available at all. What is more, as I will proceed to demonstrate, the undermining of discourse (knowledge) by practice (wit) is brought to a halt by the death of the Father and thus ultimately posits the female subversive mobilization of male discourse as a utopia that is not yet available either in comedy or in ‘real life.’

17 “as much love in rhyme/As would be crammed up in a sheet of paper” (5.2.6f.); “This letter is too long by half a mile” (5.2.54).

as the women agree, “must” indeed “prove ignorance” (2.1.103) when turned from stable text into precarious practice.

Admittedly, however, the men themselves have contributed their bit to this practical turn of knowledge. At the end of Act 4, after they have found each other out as secret authors of Petrarchan sonnets, they decide to send their poems to the lady each one is in love with. A momentous communicative decision – rather than publish the poems, they turn them into *letters*. By doing so, I suggest, they forfeit themselves the stability of their ‘academic’ and patriarchal love discourse in favor of personalized, situationally concrete, and ultimately precarious communication by letter. As Jonathan Culler has shown, poems become readable because of their impersonal quality and by virtue of the fact that they construct a fictional communicative situation at a certain distance from real-world speech acts (164–66). This impersonality and lack of concreteness guarantee its stability: by being constitutionally independent, the poem can be read again and again in ever so many different contexts. In heterosexual love poems written by men (as those negotiated in *Love's Labour's Lost*), I suggest, this provides stability for a subject-object constellation of a loving man/speaker and the beloved woman who is either the 2nd-person object (addressee) or the 3rd-person object of the text. As I have argued above, it is this very stability that places love poetry at the very center of an epistemic discourse meant to objectify and control women: love poems objectify women over and over again, eternally perhaps, because each time they are read their communicative constellation is reactivated. Time and again, the female reader will read about – and maybe identify with – a female ‘object,’ whereas the male reader will eternally experience himself as a subject describing and controlling women. Letters, on the other hand (Culler 164f.), are situationally concrete: they only make full sense when they are read by the recipient addressed both on the envelope and in the letter itself. This renders letters communicatively precarious, because they need to reach their one and only addressee in order to be fully readable,¹⁸ whereas poems may be understood by anybody who ‘opens’ them. By sending poems as letters,

18 There are several misdirected letters in *Love's Labour's Lost*: Berowne's letter to his beloved Rosaline reaches another woman and Rosaline instead receives a letter addressed to that woman.

the men themselves thus contribute to turning their stable, factual, and male-dominated knowledge about women into a procedural and precarious practice which, in Shakespeare's play, is led by women, and which depends on situational – often improvised – know-how.

When the men ultimately fail in this game which they have brought upon themselves, this is not merely another instance of the desire fulfillment deferral and anti-materialism that Breitenberg sees as constitutive of the male control-of-women discourse. There is, I believe, a rupture between the stable discourse of the celibate men and the uncontrollable communication with women (by letter, by gaze).¹⁹ In the latter, the “discursive control of women” is not just repeated by means of the “specular” (439), as Breitenberg claims, because in *Love's Labour's Lost*, writing poetry about a woman is a different thing entirely from writing to, and looking at, her.²⁰ If the endless conjuration of the unattainable female in stable texts (and visual media) represents a constitutive and ultimately (knowledge-)enabling failure, defeat in the game of wit game is a real – or at least: a different – kind of failure, one that will leave the men with their knowledge literally in tatters should it turn out that the women have torn the letters. Therefore, I tend to agree rather that the “female characters seize the means of representation – the forms and phrases of courtship – and expose them as mere representations that operate without regard to the particular situation or people involved” (Breitenberg 446).²¹ And taking up a point that other readers of *Love's Labour's Lost* have made – readers who accentuate book and media history rather than the history of gender (and) knowledge – it is also worth stressing that the procedural practice of courtly love instigated and run by the women in the play recapitulates – and reverses – the prominent early modern shift from oral to written culture, especially in the realm of love

19 Therefore, I take issue with Breitenberg's characterization of “love letters and sonnets” as structurally equivalent forms of “writing” (443).

20 Visual media can, of course, create the kind of discursive control over women described by Breitenberg, “specular control” of women is thus fully possible. Such visual media, however, are not addressed in *Love's Labour's Lost*. The gaze is necessarily part of a social practice that represents a different kind of knowledge from texts.

21 For Breitenberg, this is only a potential position regarding *Love's Labour's Lost*, one he does not (fully) share and proceeds to (partly) reject (446).

poetry (Mazzio 200; Schalkwyk), and returns it to a field of communication and skills in which women, upper-class women at least (Turner 26; 32–36), could still assume subject positions.

4 Knowledge as Discrepant Awareness in *Love's Labour's Lost*

When the female knowledge game finally takes place in the fifth act of *Love's Labour's Lost*, it comes in the guise of a masquerade in which the characters have dramatically different capabilities to see through the disguise(s) of the other(s) and therefore subjectivities with very different powers and stability. The masquerade is further bound up with the third form of knowledge that is explored in *Love's Labour's Lost*, a knowledge pertaining to the enabling conditions of the theatre itself: discrepant awareness. Discrepant awareness generally also involves the reader of a drama (or the spectator of a play) because different 'knowledges' about dramatic events and dramatic identities among the characters can only ever be perceived by a reader/spectator who knows more than or at least as much as the most 'aware' characters.

The term "discrepant awareness" was coined and the phenomenon first described by Bertrand Evans in a book on Shakespeare's comedies (viii). Meticulously describing the "stair-step structure of awareness" (20) in *Love's Labour's Lost* and all other comedies by Shakespeare, he is less interested in the political and epistemic functions and contexts of such hierarchizations. Likewise, Manfred Pfister, who refers prominently to discrepant awareness in his theory of drama, uses it only to establish one of the formal criteria for the perspective structure of the drama (49–68). With regard to *Love's Labour's Lost*, however, I believe there is much to be gained by historicizing (and also politicizing) the different forms and levels of knowledge that are being negotiated. In this play, discrepant awareness emerges not so much as a supra-temporal feature of the dramatic genre than a specific form developed by Shakespeare to involve both his plays and their recipients in the knowledge debates of his time.

Interestingly, discrepant awareness is first played out between the men and only then taken up and perfected by the women. In 4.3, the courtiers enter one after the other, each of them reciting to himself his own love

sonnet. Complicating things somewhat, each of them notices only the reciter coming after him, (not the one who has gone before) and secretly observes his successor, so that a stair-step of awareness evolves, so to speak, in which each man exposes the man after himself and is in turn exposed by his own predecessor. Berowne is the head of this awareness roundel because he is the first to enter and therefore has no one unmasking him – and he capitalizes on his advantage once everybody else has been found out:

I am betrayed by keeping company
 With men like you, men of inconstancy.
 When shall you see me write a thing in rhyme?
 Or groan for Joan? [...] (4.3.176–79)

He gleefully accuses the others of breaking the academy contract, but immediately afterwards is himself unmasked when his own sonnet is brought onto the stage by the people it has been mistakenly directed to. The awareness discrepancy is now resolved all round: everybody knows everybody else's love poems and knows that they know, too. Importantly, the last one to enjoy a higher degree of awareness is the reader/spectator because s/he is aware that Berowne will be compromised well before the character himself has a clue (Evans 20–22).

This scene does not yet explicitly connect discrepant awareness to contemporary episteme (or a critique thereof) but it does subtly expose the precariousness of the textual subject thrown into social practice. As each man enters the stage to read his love poem – to himself alone, as it seems – he is trying to celebrate, and profit from, the stable subject-object order of the poem: through the poem, its reading (and before that, its writing) men can narcissistically experience themselves as in full control of the female object of the poem, seemingly without in any way being themselves observed or controlled from without the text. At the same time, by being the observer of the male writer/reader who succeeds him, each man doubles his sovereignty, as it were. This illusion, however, is destroyed for each of the reading men as soon as the observer who has preceded him steps forth and makes it clear that far from being a subject, he has himself been, so to speak, no more than an object of observation all along. In each case (except ours as readers or viewers) the observing “demi-god [...] in the sky” who “wretched fools’ secrets o’er-eye[s]” (4.3.76f.), as Berowne puts it, finally

finds himself exposed as a narcissistic, self-affirming author/reader of love poetry and turned from a subject into an object.

It is in this situation of general male identity breakdown that the four men decide to give up the academy (text) to regain their subjectivities (“find [them]selves,” 4.3.335) by “woo[ing]” and “win[ning]” the women, i.e. by turning them into objects once more. Their ruse is to disguise themselves as “Muscovites” (5.2.121) when they meet the ladies, so as to be unobserved (or rather in this case: unidentified) subjects that observe the women once again. The men presume that their textual regime might be re-established simply by extension to include ‘real’ women. They do not realize how by turning poems into letters and face-to-face encounters, as analyzed above, they are leaving the stable world of the text behind and tread on the treacherous ground of procedural know-how that the women have cleverly prepared, in a communicative situation co-determined by and open to the ‘real’ other outside the poetic text.

To be sure, the women are aware of the disguise and, what is more, interchange identities through their own disguises, so that the men, as Evans nicely puts it, are “doubly ignorant.”²² Far from becoming objects to the men’s subjects, they (again) turn the courtiers into observed observers who only think that they are aware/sovereign whereas in reality they are being observed being not sovereign (and are not sovereign because they are observed/objectified) (cf. Parker 457). What is more, by disguising each as the other, the women indeed expose the men’s attempt to perpetuate “mere representations that operate without regard to the particular situation or people involved,” as claimed by Breitenberg (446). In what could be seen as poststructuralist parlance *avant la lettre*, Berowne, again the courtiers’ spokesman, ruefully admits not only that the men have failed to regain their sovereignty, but also that instead they have been shown what it means to “woo[...] but the sign of she” (5.2.469), woman as a mere textual signifier. The real women, on the other hand, having transformed the factual knowledge of the male love discourse into the procedural knowledge of a courtly

22 Evans reminds us that the men’s ignorance is double because they do not know the exact identities of the women and they do not know that the woman in turn know theirs (23).

identity game organized around discrepant awareness, have managed to turn the tables and become subjects in relation to the men.²³

Wit and dramatic awareness have emerged as meta-knowledges, criticizing the contemporary (gender) episteme and subjecting it to a (possibly utopian) reality test, in which this episteme is shown to suffer from the very “ignorance” that it has set out to overcome, as Berowne finally admits in 5.2.398. Shakespeare uses the pattern of early modern satirical comedy with its play on ‘witty’ degradation and discrepant awareness, not to make particular forms of knowledge socially exclusive by exposing those who just pretend to know them,²⁴ but, on the contrary, in order to attack this kind of ruling knowledge by punishing and exposing its prime representatives. At the same time, he turns the audience into prime knowers as well as knowledge analysts (and thus into ‘supporters’ of his epistemic critique).

5 Knowledge’s ‘End’: The Death of the Father and its Supersession in Female ‘Wonder’

Love’s Labour’s Lost, however, does not end here. In keeping with the title of the play, the women’s newly won sovereignty is almost immediately questioned again and the play’s critique of gendered episteme arrested. When, after the common amusement of the Nine Worthies, suddenly the death of the Princess’s father is announced, not only does all courtly play stop immediately but the Princess confesses that she does not “understand” (5.2.746) this game any longer and thereby loses (or willingly forgoes) her epistemic sovereignty. At this point it becomes clear, in a way that might be compared to Jane Austen’s novel *Mansfield Park*,²⁵ that any game can only be played by the father’s grace. The women may have disrupted the

23 After their humiliation, the men are allowed to regain some of their subjectivity and (social) grace by ridiculing the incompetent court masque of the ‘Nine Worthies’ that is presented to them by lower(-class) characters (5.2.520–710).

24 As is the case in other comedies of the day, such as Ben Jonson’s *Everyman out of his Humour* (1599), where a lack of both academic knowledge and social skills is brutally exposed and exploited.

25 As opposed to the novel – where the theatre is simply disrupted by another theatre as Litvak (1–27) has pointed out –, the theatre in *Love’s Labour’s Lost* ends abruptly and self-consciously without any final resolution between the characters.

patriarchal knowledge discourse by turning it into a concrete practice and by coming out on top of it, but they are still dependent on the 'Father' for any knowledge activity whatsoever.

The women's game is up and there will be no happy ending in marriage either.²⁶ This fact has traditionally been read as a deferral of the play's denouement to a later play, most likely to the lost comedy *Love's Labour's Won*. In concluding, however, I would much rather make the case – brief and necessarily sketchy, of course – that the gender (and) knowledge constellation suspended in *Love's Labour's Lost* is finally unraveled in one of Shakespeare's last plays with comedic elements, namely *The Winter's Tale*.²⁷ As I have shown elsewhere, in *The Winter's Tale* Shakespeare has the female characters create their own independent and separate "female cultural sphere" (Merten, "Broadside" 56; translation mine) after Queen Hermione has been cast out by her jealous husband. In this sphere, Hermione, who is believed dead, is famously resurrected as her statue seemingly becomes alive at the end of the play. In the context of gendered knowledge, this denouement may be read as a woman becoming a subject by superseding from within the sphere of her own knowledge the patriarchal discourse both of marital violence²⁸ and of the female effigy. Thus, *The Winter's Tale* symbolically overcomes the 'ending of knowledge' in the death of the Father in *Love's Labour's Lost* by resurrecting a woman who is, similarly to the women in the earlier play, representative of a female counter-episteme. What is more, the statue coming alive re-opens (female) knowledge to "wonder,"²⁹ an epistemic object/stance rigorously rejected in contemporary masculine knowledge projects, such as Francis Bacon's *Novum Organum* mentioned above. In *Love's Labour's Lost*, as I have shown, wonder is only briefly glimpsed as a possible alternative to the masculine knowledge fixation of the

26 "Our wooing doth not end like an old play: / Jack hath not Jill" (5.2.862f.).

Turner maintains that the "play paradoxically disowns itself, problematizes its own play by frustrating the hopes of a happy ending which it fed" (46).

27 According to the (posthumous) Shakespeare canon, *The Winter's Tale* is, of course, a romance, not a comedy.

28 To be sure, violence is quintessential discourse-and/as-practice, so that Hermione could be seen as overcoming a re-joining of the two in patriarchal discourse with which *Love's Labour's Lost* had so sadly ended.

29 In *The Winter's Tale* 5.3.22, the reaction to the statue is described as "wonder".

academy, but not explored further nor implemented in the female knowledge and awareness games. In *The Winter's Tale*, however, by including his audience in the experience of wonder because, quite uniquely in his oeuvre, he does not grant them an awareness superior to that of the characters during the statue's unveiling (cf. Bishop 125–75), Shakespeare seems to suggest that after male knowledge-control of women has been superseded, wonder can (again) become the highest form of knowledge. In *Love's Labour's Lost*, Shakespeare subjects patriarchal knowledge first to a female mobilization and concretization, thus granting women subjectivity in relation to men, while ultimately patriarchy prevails *ex negativo* by stopping all knowledge activity after the death of the Father. Only at the far end of his comedic cosmos, in *The Winter's Tale*, is the objectifying, 'deadening' quality of male patriarchal knowledge finally overcome when an inclusive miracle between both sexes, and one that embraces the audience as well, is made possible – perhaps the highest form of knowledge that the theatre can attain.

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