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Law, Discipline and Punishment in *Love's Labour's Lost*

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In the fantasy land of Navarre, Ferdinand and his friends imagine a utopian and rather stifling "little academe" (1.1.13)[1] to make themselves immortal. If Dumaine agrees to sign the contract proposed by Ferdinand, Berowne immediately expresses his scepticism as to the feasibility of the King's plans as for him, passions can hardly be controlled. Actually, anarchy and subversion threaten to destabilize Ferdinand's kingdom as soon as Costard transgresses the King's edict and has sex with the dairy-maid. This low-life transgression is not simply comic, it also radically questions the repressive ideology of the court and the artificial order which the King has vainly tried to enforce. In other words, by challenging royal orders, the clown implicitly questions the equity of Navarre's kingdom as much as the efficiency of its control.

What are the mechanisms of power put in place in Ferdinand's realm? How are disciplinary mechanisms brought into play and how do they interact with the festivities of Navarre? As these are interrogations directly emanating from Shakespeare's play, the answers, however complex, are certainly to be found in the text. Saturated with rhetorical speeches recalling legal formalities, *Love's Labour's Lost* is built on a quasi-judicial structure. If we accept that the world of the Inns provided Shakespeare with "a real-life model close at hand" (Kerwin 164), it is tempting to imagine that the play was written with an Inn of Court audience in mind. As a consequence, the interrelated themes of surveillance and discipline run through the comedy and provide us with new interpretative tracks to decipher its multi-layered meaning. In the following essay, I will notably argue that, while the notion of "discipline" seems linked to a male quartet obsessed with oaths and infringements of the law, "punishment" and "penance" remain associated with the Princess and her retinue. This will lead me to examine how power, in the play, proves a major source of social conformity, and to question the subversive nature, often taken for granted, of the ladies' behaviour.

[1] All quotes from *Love's Labour's Lost* are taken from William C. Carroll's edition. References to other Shakespeare's plays are drawn from *The Complete Works* (eds. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor).

1. *Love's Labour's Lost* and the Inns of Court

Located West of London, the Inns of Court were the "hostels or colleges established in Edward I's reign, ca. 1300, for the accommodation of law students" (Halliday 243). Gray's Inn and the Middle Temple, in particular, were well known for their extravagant entertainments. Interestingly enough, *The Comedy of Errors* was performed in Gray's Inn Hall on 28 December 1594. This means that Shakespeare was present during the Christmas revels of 1594-95, which notably included "Negro Tartars" and performers disguised as Russians (Plunket Barton 27). While we cannot dismiss the hypothesis according to which the pageant may have been influenced by Shakespeare's play, it is highly probable that things happened the other way round, *i.e.* that the masque of Muscovites was inspired from what the playwright saw at Gray's Inn. This would explain why a contrite Berowne explains to the Princess that he and his companions wanted to "dash" their aborted masque like "a Christmas comedy" (5.2.462), an allusion often interpreted as a hint at the Gray's Inn Revels.

Be that as it may, Inns of Court gentlemen were often derided for spending more time in the nearby theatres than in the study of law.[2] In *Love's Labour's Lost*, the men spend more time in games—be they amorous, courtly or theatrical—than in the study of philosophy. Even more interesting perhaps is the fact that the spatial organization of Shakespeare's comedy perfectly fits the structure of the Inns. R.S. White has convincingly argued that even the imagined topography of Navarre reproduces the characteristic architecture of a place like Grey's Inn:

> An exterior is designed to be forbidding to all strangers, and presumably females in particular. Buildings have an air of a 'silent court' leading to an inner 'curious knotted garden' and quadrangle. [...] [E]ven the symbolism of [the Princess and her retinue] entering through the 'back door' of nature is appropriate to the play's pattern. They have, in [Berowne's] words, climbed over the house to unlock the little gate (1.1.109), since they would have been denied entrance by some Cerberus-like porter or misogynist, growling bursar at the front lodge. (151)

If Shakespeare does indeed allude to the back-door entrance to Navarre's estate, thus hinting at back-door sex and sodomy (a practice frequently referred to in a play necessitating an unusually high number of boy actors), he also refers to the then well-known misogyny of legal apprentices. One should remember that, because they brought too much distraction, women were not welcome in any of the four societies of law students, and Navarre clearly

[2] The courtier and writer Thomas Overbury mocked for example the "Fantasticke Innes of Court man" who "hath heard one mooting and seen two plaies" (Overbury sig. H1^{r}).

echoes this when he decides to give up the company of ladies in the very first lines of the comedy.

The King, however, will soon yield to temptation and behave more like a Lord of Misrule than like a serious, dedicated ruler. There is, in fact, "little sign that he acquire[s] much technical knowledge of litigation" (Honan n.p.)—an observation which might be equally relevant to describe the young and idle law students attending the Inns—in his so-called "academe," and for all his literary pretensions, he is never seen reading any book in the course of the play. Parodying his own royal function, he is more of a Prince of fools unable to bring his shows to an end, and as such, quite comparable to the incompetent "Prince of Purpoole"[3] who presided over the Christmas festivities of Gray's Inn.

In 1594-95, these were placed under the temporary rule of a young student called Henry Helmes. The undisciplined and jesting Helmes resembles in many ways the dejected King of Navarre who, in the play, sees himself as a brilliant student but only manages to be a rather poor entertainer. Noticing his sombre mood, the impertinent Rosaline describes him as "seasick" (5.2.393). Critics and editors alike have noticed that her jibe, here, probably called to mind an incident attached to the Gray's Inn revels of 1594-95.[4] Besides the intriguing mentions of the "Christmas comedy" and the "seasick" Ferdinand, a third allusion to Gray's Inn can be detected in the Princess's ironic statement about the so-called "mess of Russians" who presumably visited her and her ladies-in-waiting during their stay in Navarre (5.2.361). According to the *OED*, the word "mess" can be used in connection to "benchers' and law-students' dinners at the English Inns of Court," even though it was originally defined as "any of the small groups, normally of four people sitting together and served from the same dishes, into which the company at a banquet was usually divided" (II, 5.a). In all likelihood, Shakespeare associated his own burlesque "mess of Russians" with the entertainers he had previously seen at Gray's Inn, thereby winking at the numerous law students who undoubtedly came to see *Love's Labour's Lost* performed onstage (Yates 156).

Incidentally, the play world of the comedy is one of fierce competition. While men and women are pitted against each other in a race to honours and glory, the lords themselves are

[3] This name was derived from the grounds of the manor of Portpool on which Gray's Inn had been built.

[4] During these twelve days' festivities, the Prince of Purpoole and his companions pretended to return from a campaign in Russia. The merry Prince unfortunately had to decline a visit to Elizabeth I, and he apologized for his exhaustion (and, presumably, his drunkenness) "by length of my Journey, and my sickness at Sea" (*Gesta Grayorum* in Nichols 262).

rival poets vying against each other to write the best love poems.[5] The strong sense of emulation which seems to be theirs actually also echoes the feverish atmosphere of the Inns of Court. There, competition and rivalry were unceasing, and they were accelerated by legal contests, especially the "moots," or practice procedures, involving the instructional discussion of a hypothetical case. In *Love's Labour's Lost*, a moot is presented right from the beginning as Armado and Costard both present an argument before Ferdinand who then has to "pronounce" an appropriate "sentence" (1.2.273-74): "you shall fast a week with bran and water" (174). Such a punishment proves particularly ironical, of course, as the King himself has just decided to "study and fast" (1.1.48) in an austere academe where the lords are supposed to "touch no food" (1.1.39) once a week and have "but one meal on every day beside" (1.1.40). While it quickly becomes obvious that such a programme of abstinence does not fit the lords' desires, the King feels like testing his own idea on the clown, an innocent rustic turned into a mock sacrificial victim.

The Inns' agonistic games were also literary, since "[t]he practice of 'capping verse', or responding to one's verse with a verse of one's own based on the final sound or word of the preceding poem" (Kerwin 164) was notably part of the display of wit which took place during the annual revels.[6] Poetry was used as a weapon, and as such, it often took the form of epigrams whose aggressive brevity and sharp irony made them excellent means of attack. Not uncoincidentally, epigrams are part and parcel of the characters' speeches in *Love's Labour's Lost*. On the one hand, in their tit-for-tat games, the ladies keep "provok[ing] in the audience corresponding back-and-forth movements" (Kerwin 172). On the other, the young Moth also performs epigrammatically as he incisively comments upon events while manipulating his audience at the same time. In fact, almost all the characters of the play, except Dull, revel in epigrammatic sentences, and rely on "paradox" (4.3.245) to impress their interlocutors. Incidentally, the use of paradox and "inverted orders" was deeply engrained in the culture of the Inns (Magnusson 204). An archetypal law student, the "pert Berowne" (5.2.272) claims that books weaken the brain (1.1.72-76), that ladies' eyes are the best of books, and he also relies on "the favourite Inns of Court example," namely that "foul-looking women are the most desirable" (ibid.).[7]

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[5] They are also ironically portrayed as "competitors in oath" by Boyet (2.1.82).

[6] This practice is illustrated in act 2, scene 1, in a short exchange between the Princess and the King, as the French lady has just let him know the diplomatic purpose of her visit: "KING Madam, I will, if suddenly I *may*. / PRINCESS You will the sooner that I were *away*, / For you'll prove perjured if you make me *stay*" (2.1.110-12, my emphasis).

[7] See, for instance, 4.3.239-44. There are still many more instances of legal jargon and rhetoric strongly reminiscent of the Inns in Shakespeare's comedy, but a few will suffice here. While in act 1, scene 1, Costard's

It is clear, therefore, that the playwright had an audience of law students in mind. Taken together, these allusions to the culture of the Inns point to the importance of law in Navarre (here perceived as a distorted image of England much more than of France), including its excesses and its absurdities, and they establish a dramatic pattern in which order and revel, or regulation and misrule, become narrowly associated.

2. Surveillance and Male Discipline

Display and control are inextricably intertwined in the comedy. If Ferdinand, embarked in a ship of fools, fails to understand it, the women, as to them, are perfectly aware of the fact that revelry and rule are the two sides of the same coin. Their watching position testifies to their cleverness, while the disorganized lords remain incredibly immature. They quickly become objects of vision, while the ladies themselves are the viewing subjects. The ideal of Petrarchan poetry, turning the desired lady into an object of scopic desire, is thus overturned.

In act 3, scene 1, as he puns on the multiple meanings of the word "watch," Berowne reveals the importance of watching and being watched in what he regards as a civilized and ordered society:

> […] I love, I sue, I seek a wife,
> A woman, that is like a German clock,
> Still a-repairing, ever out of frame,
> And never going aright, being a watch,
> But being watched that it may still go right!
> (3.1.166-70)

While the image of time is clearly a bawdy one here, it also shows how Berowne unconsciously associates clocks with physical coercion: the feminine body, implicitly compared to a German dial, should work perfectly.

As a matter of fact, a perverse logic of regulation and excessive surveillance underpins the actions of all the characters in the play. It is worth noting that the kingdom of Navarre fits "a strict spatial partitioning" in which "inspection function ceaselessly" and "[t]he gaze is alert everywhere" (Foucault 195). The parodic eavesdropping moment of act 4 scene 3 comes immediately to mind because it encapsulates the rule of the eye which characterises Navarre.

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absurd defence parodies the legal formula "in manner and form following" (1.1.195-203), Navarre's decree that no woman shall approach "on pain of losing her tongue" (1.1.122-23) satirizes the "mock penalties issued at the Inns" (Magnusson 204). The very phrasing of Ferdinand's edict (1.1.37-46) also echoes the wording of the Inns' mocking regulations.

Yet, this episode is actually is part of a broader scopic pattern since all the characters of the play enjoy viewing, observing and detecting. Ferdinand wants to exert control over his subjects,[8] Don Armado keeps an eye on Jaquenetta, and the ladies send Boyet spying on the four lords. Boyet's role is often dismissed by critics, who regard him as an effeminate sycophant embodying the hypocrisy of the court. Yet, his spying directly causes the failure of the men's entertainments, since without his help, the Princess and her ladies-in-waiting would never have decided to deceive them. Incidentally, his surveillance pattern places the audience level with the Princess and her suit. By contrast, the young men fail to gain power over the ladies as nobody spies for them, so that they are bound to lead inefficient, internal investigations instead of properly monitoring—or disciplining—their fair visitors.

The notion of "discipline" can relate either to punishment or training,[9] and the fact is that "discipline" as "instruction" or "training" also lies at the core of the play. *Love's Labour's Lost* is indeed permeated with references to early modern conduct manuals which then taught young gentlemen to perform acts of politeness and dissimulate their feelings, and advised honest ladies to behave submissively. Ferdinand and his friends thus operate under cover, following the instructions of Stefano Guazzo[10] and the likes, but their reluctant visitors see through their artifices and do not appreciate such courteous behaviour which they simply regard as nonsensical. As a result, what is primarily intended as civil conversation from the men's part always degenerates into ebullient wit-sallies while linguistic exchanges unavoidably end in verbal sparring.

If love "[l]ives not [...] *immured* in the brain" (4.3.297, my emphasis), discipline needs to be immured to be effective. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault noted that "discipline proceeds from the distribution of individuals in space" and that it "sometimes requires enclosure, the specification of a place heterogeneous to all others and closed in upon itself" (141). The little academe imagined by Ferdinand is no immune space and has much in common with Foucault's "protected place of disciplinary monotony" (ibid.). We have already seen that the sites of the inns were walled enclosures. The King's academe seems to have incorporated an ideal of law and discipline which proves comically unenforceable. Enumerating secluded and tightly controlled places, Foucault quotes the "*colleges*," the "monastic model" and the

[8] This is nowhere more obvious than in the first scene of the play, when he tries to impose an absurd rule upon his own friends.

[9] If we take the latter sense into account, it can be defined as the "instruction or teaching intended to mould the mind and character and instil a sense of proper, orderly conduct and action; training to behave or act in a controlled and effective manner; mental, intellectual, moral, or spiritual training or exercise" (*OED*, II, 4.a).

[10] The Italian writer Stefano Guazzo (1530-1593) was the author of *La civil conversatione* (1574), a successful conduct book translated into English in 1581.

"military barracks" (ibid.). If there are no military barracks in Navarre, the characters behave with an unflinching belligerence to win a war of sexes, and the King's estate is *de facto* transformed into a military encampment of sorts. As to Foucault's *college*, it is what Ferdinand may have in mind when he mentions his academe as a place to study science and philosophy. Last but not least, this ruined college actually gives way, in the very last scene, to a monastic model—an "austere insociable life" (5.2.773)—imposed by the ladies in mourning.

If they order the men to live in isolation in "some forlorn and naked hermitage" (5.2.769), it is also because they believe in the power of self-discipline. By the end of the 16th century, it was becoming one of the main ideals championed by the aristocratic circles. Because it was thought to dampen obnoxious passions, inculcated self-restraint was of increasing concern to Shakespeare's contemporaries, and this new preoccupation went hand in hand with the gradual rise of modern selfhood. Yet, in *Love's Labour's Lost*, Ferdinand and his friends fail to dominate their passions, and there are reasons to believe that their hermitage will remain sheer wishful thinking.

We get the measure of Navarre's deficient regulating system as soon as the constable comes onstage. Shakespeare thought of his characters generically and so, as the carnivalesque embodiment of Justice, Anthony Dull is systematically given the speech-heading "Constable" in both the Quarto and the Folio versions.[11] The contrast between his function and his acts was thus particularly emphasised for early modern readers (keeping in mind that *Love's Labour's Lost* was the first play printed under Shakespeare's name), whereas in today's editions of the play, it tends to disappears with the name "Dull" used as a transparent speech-heading. Shakespeare's learned contemporaries immediately realized that "honest Dull" (5.1.126) lacks all the necessary competences to stand for male authority. Neither learned nor courtly, he performs almost no duties in Navarre. Granted, on the instruction of Don Armado, he brings Costard to the King and brings a minimal contribution to the clown's condemnation, but it is then Armado who is eventually in charge of guarding the clown, not Dull himself.

The realm of Navarre is thus highly paradoxical: while discipline and surveillance are supposed to be its main mechanisms of power, it is full of incongruities, and as such, Ferdinand's estate looks a bit like an early modern consistory court (known as a bawdy court) which mixed facts and gossips, justice and spectacle, and order and licence. Like theatres, bawdy courts served as "a safety valve where society could release anger and shame in a

[11] In his production of the play, Brook wanted to conjure up "the typical figure of the London bobby" (Gilbert 48).

ritualized fashion that reduced the likelihood of public disorder" (Bate 180). Jonathan Bate explains that

> [i]n a parish such as Stratford, the local consistory court would have been set up inside the church. There was a raised seat for the judge—who was the vicar—and a large table for the notary and the witnesses to sit around. The crier would stand near the notary and the accused stood facing the judge. (176)

Punishments concerned fornication, defamation, and other offensive social behaviours. Incidentally, the twofold case of Costard and Armado perfectly illustrates the type of problem dealt with by these ecclesiastical probate jurisdictions which were actually quite efficient (Erickson 36). Another important aspect of these courts is that women, usually silent and submissive, were there turned into active and eloquent agents, just like the ladies lionized by Shakespeare in *Love's Labour's Lost*.

While it is true that, in *Love's Labour's Lost*, Nathaniel the curate is too much deprived of common sense to occupy the position of the vicar—except, maybe, when he asks Holofernes to "abrogate scurrility'' (4.2.49)—, the play can be read as a series of mock trials, or fake penal proceedings, featuring many different plaintiffs (*i.e.* the infuriated Armado, the hypocritical Berowne, the four gentlemen together as they blame the Worthies for their shabby performance, Costard as he accuses Holofernes of having made Jaquenetta pregnant, and eventually, the ladies accusing the lords of fickleness). What ensues from this is that almost all the characters are sometimes accusers, and sometimes suspects. Witnesses, as to them, are to be found among the lower orders of society and the play's denouement clearly suggests that the most competent judge throughout is the French Princess, already training as a Queen.[12]

3. Female Punishment and Humiliation

Navarre is thus a place of training and perilous experiments. The famous statutes of 1572 and 1597 condemned as vagabonds "all idle persons going about" and "using [...] unlawfull Games and Playes" (Tawney and Power, 328 and 355). It is no coincidence that in

[12] No wonder then if the legal vocabulary of the consistory court permeates *Love's Labour's Lost*. Berowne alludes to "trotting paritors" (3.1.164) as he blames Cupid for directing the tortuous course of things. In the same scene, a little earlier on (3.1.110-11), the clown uses a cognate of the word "purge" when he begs Armado to let him go out of prison (See *OED*, "Purge," v.1.a: "*refl.* To clear oneself or one's character of an accusation or suspicion of guilt; (formerly also) †to avoid punishment by claiming benefit of clergy (*obs.*); (*Law*) to establish one's innocence by an assertion on oath supported by character witnesses, or by trial by combat or ordeal"). Last but not least, Rosaline compares Ferdinand to a "vain petitioner" (5.2.207), *i.e* a vain "plaintiff" (*OED*, 2).

Shakespeare's play, Costard, one of the most hilarious amateur players entertaining the court, is the first to disobey the edicts of the little academe. His libidinal energy not only makes him a trickster, it also makes him a dangerous actor and vagabond who keeps associating festivity and vice. Incidentally, his short-term imprisonment suggests that the organization of Ferdinand's seemingly idyllic kingdom is predicated on the court's exclusion, or temporary rejection, of all sources of disorder. The King thus marginalizes the dairy maid and, from then on, the letters addressed to her will be checked by the French Princess, regardless of the wench's intimacy (4.1.56). Even more importantly, Ferdinand secludes the clown as an unofficial jester just as he will later on silence the Worthies once he has realized how his own defects are being displayed in their show.

In this ambivalent culture of entertainment and coercion, Jaquenetta, acting as Costard's female alter ego, is careful not to speak too much, but she is similarly endowed with the spirit of subversion. To Armado who tells her of his love (1.2.115), she cheekily answers: "So I heard you say" (1.2.116). If she believes in the delights of sexual pleasure, she is a sceptic as far as romantic love is concerned. She, after all, is regarded as "a child of our grandmother Eve, a female" (1.1.246) and, as such, she symbolizes the fall of mankind.

In contrast, the self-composed Princess and her retinue seem much more maidenly than the "damosella virgin" (4.2.113) herself. Yet, in many respects, Jaquenetta can also be viewed as a mirror image of the French women who are experts in bawdy puns and lascivious jokes. Whereas the literate ladies use words to express themselves, the rustic maid relies on her body and, in the end, she triumphs as the only fertile woman in the play. According to Foucault, "the systems of punishment are to be situated in a certain 'political economy' of the body" (25). In other words, "it is always the body that is at issue—the body and its forces, their utility and their docility, their distribution and their submission" (ibid.). In Shakespeare's comedy, the men's nostrum works through wit and rhetoric while the women's consists in wit and anatomy. Even though Jaquenetta proves incapable of formulating such an analysis, she is perfectly aware of the power of her own body. After all, by falling pregnant, she forces Armado to marry her and to give her and her baby a name (an important fact in a comedy obsessed with the power to name), thereby making her an honourable—if destitute—wife.

The other women in the play do not so much eroticize their bodies as their politicize it. Refusing to turn the female body as an object of consumption, they make it an object of conquest and first transform it into a "copy-book" (5.2.42), *i.e.* "a book for beginners to copy in" (Blake 290), thereby implying that the lords, far from being experienced, actually know much less than their fair visitors. In effect, this makes them members of the dominated order

while the Princess and her friends belong to the dominating order. Eventually, the French maids turn their bodies into impenetrable fortresses. Tellingly, Foucault observes that "a punishment like forced labour or eve, imprisonment—has never functioned without a certain additional element of punishment that certainly concerns the body itself: rationing of food, sexual deprivation, corporal punishment, solitary confinement" (15). While the little academe imagined by Ferdinand amounts to a self-inflicted punishment implying altogether "rationing of food," "sexual deprivation" and "solitary confinement," the ladies focus on "sexual deprivation," exercising their power through chastity. In England, one should not forget that the cult of Elizabeth relied on her supposed virginity. The tenacious Princess, often compared to the English Queen, follows the same strategy as her royal model. In other words, chastity provides her with a weapon stressing her honesty and punishing her suitor at the same time. So, if the ladies are not allowed to "come [...] within [the King's] gates" (2.1.169), they retaliate by forbidding their male counterparts to enter their own gates, a much crueller punishment indeed.

Strangely enough, the (aborted) love story of the play begins with a deferred process of litigation over a debt which will then pave the way for "love's argument" (5.2.721). Indeed, the Princess of France first and foremost visits Navarre because she intends to reclaim her father's title in Aquitaine.[13] On behalf of the old and sick French sovereign, she thus claims that the first hundred thousand had been paid, and as she is challenged to provide evidence of this, she asks Boyet to show the "acquittances" (*i.e.* legally admissible written evidence of repayment) which her father had received from Navarre's own father (2.1.158-60). The councillor, however, cautiously defers the moment when he must show them: "Tomorrow you shall have a sight of them" (2.1.161-63). Boyet's promise is of course not more reliable than the lords' oaths as "tomorrow," here, becomes synonymous with "never," which the Princess is probably aware of. As she fails to produce any acquittance, we remain uncertain as to the validity of her suit. From this point of view, her later insistence on "heavenly oaths, vowed with integrity" (5.2.356) seems more opportunistic than sincere. Is she a cynic taking advantage of Ferdinand's bachelorhood?

[13] In 1937, Kenneth Muir observed that "[t]he Stratford lawsuit about some of his mother's property, which bears some resemblance to the Navarre contention in *Love's Labour's Lost*, was brought to London in 1589, and Shakespeare's name was mentioned in connexion with it. [...] With the failure of the lawsuit, he was obliged to look for a livelihood and so drifted into the theatre" (Muir 37).

Shakespeare offers no easy answer, but he suggests that, behind her charm, lies an impressive cunning and a sense of *Realpolitik*.[14]

According to Ann Rosalind Jones,

> [o]ne way that the culture of early modern Europe figured the spectacle of women punishing men was as comic inversion. […] Folk rituals represented women on top to nonreading publics in charivaris and skimmington parades, while polemical pamphlets entertained the literate with the speeches of angry women putting misogynist men on trial. (23)

In *Love's Labour's Lost*, the "girls of France" (4.3.340) embody female unruliness and refuse to trust their interlocutors until the very end. Even after Marcadé has come in to announce the death of the French King and the men have confessed their love, the Princess now turned Queen asserts "Your oath I will not trust" (5.2.767), putting the emphasis on the "trust" she will probably never grant Ferdinand—all the more so as being now a sovereign herself, she does not need him anymore.

She, in fact, has always refused to believe the King of Navarre because "his rhetorical promiscuity has undermined his oathworthiness" (Hutson 15). Her scepticism is immediately shared by her pretty friends, so much so that the ladies rapidly resolve to punish the lords by exposing them to public humiliation. Because, like Maria in *Twelfth Night*, the ladies are literate, and therefore know how to write and read, they are able to stage the men's disgrace. Curiously, they are never seen writing anything.[15] They, as readers, entrap men as desiring writers. No wonder if the Princess and her ladies-in-waiting are figured as a locus of anxiety. In fact, they can be regarded as public prosecutors trying to effeminize their male victims. All of this tends to suggest that, as law-givers, they formulate the norms much more than they seek to bypass them, and in such a context, it would be wrong to regard them as the great transgressors of the play. On the contrary, they are those who, against the lords' (mis)rule, brandish rule and order to vanquish chaos.

The men, in fact, are made to suffer a quadruple humiliation: in act 2, scene 1, when the ladies meet the lords and Rosaline shows her repartee to Berowne; in 5.2, during the Masque of Muscovites, as they exchange their identities and refuse to dance; later on in the same scene, when the lords come backs to hear that "[a] mess of Russians left [them] but of late"

[14] We eventually learn that the Princess has won her suit, since in the last act, she mentions her "great suit so easily obtained" (5.2.73).

[15] Since handwriting was thought to be a means of consolidating women's position in the private sphere, Shakespeare may have wanted to portray much more autonomous ladies, able to position themselves in the public sphere.

(5.2.361); and after the death of the French King, when the not so "mad wenches" (3.1.253) devise specific punishments for the men in order to avoid marriage.

Shame stems from the moment when the private becomes public. This is exactly what happens in *Love's Labour's Lost*, a play in which no scene ever takes place in a private room. Mary C. Mansfield writes that

> [...] public humiliation of sinners is perhaps the most powerful means of instilling conformity in a community. Public penances simultaneously promised salvation in the next world and public order in this. (5)

In other words, this practice of penance and shaming is, in spite of its elaborate forms, much more normative than subversive. Indeed, contrition and confession go hand in hand, and they are part and parcel of the old ritual of humiliation. Right from the very first scene, Berowne had predicted that if the lords came to forswear themselves, they would be punished by "eternal shame" (1.1.155). The French maids simply enact what Berowne himself foresees at the beginning of the comedy and perpetuate a traditional shaming ritual to prevent the lords from fulfilling their carnal desires. This, in a sense, corresponds to Foucault's view, according to which mechanisms of power are implemented in order to gather precise information on people's private life. In this regard, confession acts as a form of power: in *Love's Labour's Lost*, the ladies incite the men to confess their sins and "most maculate thoughts" (1.2.76) the better to control them.

One could say that confession is somewhat secularized here. Yet, in the end, female punishment seems to take the form of religious penance. The men are indeed punished less for their ill-doings—after all, they have done nothing wrong since they have been maintained in a state of frustration by their beloved—than for their bad thoughts. They are not perceived as offenders, but as sinners full of "guiltiness" (5.2.765) who must first become pilgrims and ask for grace in order to be entitled to love. The King is therefore imposed a Christian "trial" (5.2.777) which actually parallels that of Armado who, as a destitute sinner and firm Catholic believer, intends to "go woolward for penance" (5.2.686-87). But if the Spaniard decides to undergo a voluntary penance, Ferdinand's sentence is inflicted by a lady, which must painfully add to his sense of shame:

> PRINCESS [...]
> [...] go with speed
> To some forlorn and naked hermitage,
> Remote from all the pleasures of the world.

> [...]
> Then, at the expiration of the year,
> Come challenge me, challenge me by these deserts,
> And by this virgin palm now kissing thine,
> I will be thine. [...]
> (5.2.768-81)

While the Princess associates her white "palm" with purity and virginity, the word "palm," here, also alludes to the "palmer", *i.e.* a Christian pilgrim.[16] At this stage, however, nothing indicates that such a penance will lead to absolution. The same goes for the other gentlemen who will all have to wait for twelve months before seeing their mistresses again.

While, in England, the very practice of pilgrimage had ceased roughly thirty year before Shakespeare was born, the presence of the old faith can be felt within most of his plays. Here, turned into passionate pilgrims exiled from their beloved, Ferdinand and his reluctant friends are in quest of their respective "holy shrine[s]" (*Romeo and Juliet*, 1.5.93), and the ladies become, like Juliet, a focus of power and worship. In punishing the men, the shrew French girls have therefore turned themselves into objects of intense desire.

Conclusion: the Exercise of Power

If, in the play, Shakespeare assigns the use of legal language to the men, he nonetheless turns them into puppets, constantly spied on by their guests. In other words, while the French ladies prove excellent "shooter[s]" (4.1.101), the men are condemned to remain mediocre suitors. The problem is that Ferdinand has put in place a complex system which he fails to regulate, while the Princess has perfectly understood how to use space to her own profit. In spite of its dream-like appearance, then, the enclosed kingdom of Navarre is rapidly turned into a gilded cage. Foucault explains this phenomenon as follows:

> This enclosed, segmented space, observed at every point, in which the individuals are inserted in a fixed place, in which the slightest movements are supervised, in which all events are recorded, in which an uninterrupted work of writing links the centre and periphery, [...], in which each individual is constantly located, examined and distributed among the living beings, the sick and the dead—all this constitutes a compact model of the disciplinary mechanism. (197)

[16] On palms, palmers and pilgrims see Juliet's address to Romeo in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, 5.1.96-99: "Good pilgrim, you do wrong you hand too much, / Which mannerly devotion shows in this. / For saints have hands that pilgrims' hands do touch, / And palm to palm is holy palmers' kiss."

Such a mechanism is indeed at work in Shakespeare's comedy in which "an uninterrupted" flow of letters "link the centre and periphery," and it is deftly manipulated by the four maids because they want to take hold of power and do not intend to give up their autonomy for the benefit of their hosts. Unsurprisingly, marriage appears as the most terrible punishment ever for them, and in order to avoid offering themselves passively to the lords, the women have no other choice than being aggressive as soon as they find themselves confronted with linguistic abuse. Chastisement is the best defence and, above all, it is the surest means to exercise power. Of course, one could still argue here that, in the comedy, it is Ferdinand who as King of Navarre possesses power, whereas the Princess only becomes Queen at the end. Yet, as Foucault writes, "power is exercised rather than possessed" (26) and this is precisely what Ferdinand fails to understand.

It should never be forgotten that the women come to Navarre because they feel that Aquitaine had suffered an injustice. They are here, therefore, to *exercise* power and take an active part in their own defence. Tested, challenged, if not titillated by frivolous young men who do not take them seriously, they win their case and they reprimand their suitors through forced celibacy, envisaged here as a perpetual mode of living. For, as the play draws to an end, no one can seriously believe that any marriage will ever take place. As far as the lords are concerned, they are bound to forswear themselves again and again. As to the new Queen of France, she appears as an avatar of the fiercely independent Queen Elizabeth, who was married to her country... and knew very well how to exert pressure upon men in order to get what *she* desired.

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