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A restless play of affective infections: Gendered spherology in *Love's Labour's Lost*

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Abstract: The article examines intimate space in Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost* and argues that the play spatially satirizes Petrarchan rhetoric in which women's eyes emit light that affects and infects men. The imagery of faces, vision, and light opens a view into what Peter Sloterdijk refers to as early modernity's "restless play of affective infections" arising between subjects in shared, "microspheric" space. The play's blurrings of gendered space can be better understood if the male academe is perceived as a microspheric project that is influenced by the beams emitted from the women's eyes, as per emission theory prevalent in Shakespeare's time.

Keywords: emission theory, gendered space, microspherology, Petrarch, Shakespeare.

Un juego inquieto de infecciones afectivas: Esferología de género en *Love's Labour's Lost*

Resumen: Este artículo explora el espacio íntimo en *Love's Labour's Lost*, de Shakespeare, y sostiene que la obra satiriza espacialmente la retórica petrarquista en la que los ojos de las mujeres emiten una luz que afecta e infecta a los hombres. Las imágenes de caras, de la visión y la luz permiten ver reflejado lo que Peter Sloterdijk llama el «juego inquieto de infecciones afectivas» de la modernidad temprana que emerge entre sujetos que comparten un espacio «microesférico». Las indefiniciones del espacio de género en la obra se pueden entender mejor si se percibe la academia masculina como un proyecto microesférico influido por los rayos que emiten los ojos de las mujeres, de acuerdo con la teoría de la emisión que prevalecía en la época de Shakespeare.

Palabras clave: teoría de la emisión, espacio de género, microesferología, Petrarca, Shakespeare.

Um jogo inquieto de infeções afetivas: Esferologia de género em *Love's Labour's Lost*

Resumo: Este artigo examina o espaço íntimo em *Love's Labour's Lost*, de Shakespeare, e argumenta que a peça satiriza espacialmente a retórica petrarquista em que os olhos das mulheres emitem uma luz que afeta e infeta os homens. A imagética dos rostos, da visão e da luz permite-nos olhar para aquilo a que Peter Sloterdijk chama o «jogo inquieto de infeções afetivas» do início da modernidade, o qual surge entre sujeitos num espaço «microsférico» partilhado. As indefinições de espaço de género na peça podem ser mais bem compreendidas se a academia masculina for entendida como um projeto microsférico influenciado pelos feixes emitidos pelos olhos das mulheres, de acordo com a teoria da emissão em vigor no tempo de Shakespeare.

Palavras-chave: teoria da emissão, espaço de género, microsferologia, Petrarca, Shakespeare.

1. Introduction

When Walter Pater, in 1878, observed how there was very little "dramatic interest" in William Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost* (1901, 162), he touched on a sentiment voiced by many critics before and after him. Modern scholars, though relatively lenient in their assessments, often hold onto to the play's lack of plot.[1] Where is the play's interest, then? Out of all the commentators, I find Pater most convincing, as he centers on the play's spatial quality:

> The scene – a park of the King of Navarre – is unaltered throughout; and the unity of the play is not so much the unity of a drama as that of a series of pictorial groups, in which the same figures reappear, in different combinations but on the same background. [...] On one side, a fair palace; on the other, the tents of the Princess of France, who has come on an embassy from her father to the King of Navarre; in the midst, a wide space of smooth grass. (1901, 162–63)

The background against which Shakespeare lays out his characters is one of clearly delineated spaces, that of men inside and women outside, and the play proceeds by following the spatial dynamics developing between the characters in and between these spheres. While I agree with the importance Pater lays on space, I attempt here to develop a clearer image of the gendered interplay of these environments. What I argue in terms of gendered space is not simply that interiority (the academe inside the court) is associated with masculinity while exteriority (the park outside) is aligned with femininity, but rather that the nuanced interrelations between these opposites are most conspicuously articulated through the play's rhetoric of what I here call affective infection emitted through the eyes.

When the men fall in love and the center cannot hold, *Love's Labour's Lost* becomes a playground of affective energies – Pater's "series of pictorial groups" – where negotiations over who gets to influence whose space are under way. The way the men's falling-in-love is developed through the rhetorical deployment of images related to faces, vision,

[1] See, for instance, G. R. Hibbard's introduction to the Oxford edition (Shakespeare 1990, 71) and Maus (1991, 213). For the ways scholars have begun their pieces by listing the play's shortcomings as per its reception history, see, for instance, Richard David's introduction in the second Arden series (Shakespeare 1951, xiii) or William C. Carroll's introduction to his monograph on the play (1976, 3–7). In more recent studies, Collington & Collington (2014, 786) begin by asserting the play "has always been something of a puzzle," and Elb (2015, 133) starts similarly by stating the play "has long provoked discord among scholars, eluding a unified opinion."

and light is central to this essay. Attending to what the German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk (2011, 207) calls the "restless play of affective infections" occurring in interpersonal space during the early modern period, I argue, helps us better articulate the play's spatial processes. In this "microspherological" perspective, Navarre's enclosed academe represents an insular space that is gradually transforming – through contact with women's illuminating yet infecting eyes – toward a shared, interfacial sphere. What begins in a refusal of shared intimate space with women progresses to a desire of that very thing, enunciated through a slew of Petrarchan images on the influence of women's eyes. The spatial synthesis the men begin to wish for ultimately fails at the end of the play, although, again following Sloterdijk, the emergence of death suggests an opening of the play's microspheres to something more encompassing. The essay thus contributes to the already fruitful discussions on gendered space by applying microspherology to literary study.[2]

From the perspective of early modern history, women have been associated with indoor and men with outdoor space on the basis of Biblical, medical, and classical justifications (Flather 2007, 17–18).[3] The same dichotomy has certainly been noted in studies of early modern literature, too.[4] *Love's Labour's Lost*, however, can at least in one sense be seen to invert this traditional configuration. Miriam Kammer has observed this reversal in the play and how it "breaks apart thousands of years of the traditional connection between women and domesticity as an ideological construct and as a material reality" (2018, 472). The established perception of women as part of domestic space is assuredly challenged by the travelling Princess of France and her ladies in waiting, who are entitled to similar court space as the men, though the men deny them access. Yet even if Shakespeare flouts the tradition where women belong to the domestic sphere, he is not suggesting that the men are angels in the house. Rather, he is trivializing the aspirations of court-

[2] Recent studies of gender and space in the play comprise Tara Collington and Philip Collington's (2014) fine-grained analysis of Bakthinian chronotopes and chronologies; Miriam Kammer's (2018) performance-oriented ecofeminist reading; and Julianne Mentzer's (2015) closer look into the play's exclusionary male space as a site of prolonged adolescence.

[3] For a terminological clarification on "spheres," it must be noted that my discussion of the concept is not invested in the social history of what has been theorized as the specific mid-seventeenth-century "emergence of separate spheres" between men in public and women in domestic space (Shoemaker 1998, 6). Rather, the essay focuses on Sloterdijk's distinct, phenomenological understanding of "spheres." Likewise, Roberts (1991, 3–6) has elaborated on Shakespeare's gender–nature dynamics via overlapping diagrams that visually suggest "spheres," yet, similar to Shoemaker, are not concerned with phenomenology.

[4] See, for instance, Pearson (2003).

dwelling men who have been afforded the resources and freedoms of court space. It is political, educational, and religious power that grants the men of Navarre the possibility of self-immurement. This is in a stark contrast to the reality of early modern women in general, whose inferior and subordinated status severely impeded such higher aspirations (Charlton 1999, 27).

In what follows, I will first outline Sloterdijk's notion of microspherology together with a brief overview of the way the ocular influence, so to speak, has been negotiated in the early modern tradition prior to Shakespeare, focusing on English configurations of the Petrarchan tradition in *Tottel's Miscellany* (1557) and Edmund Spenser's *Amoretti* (1595). This contextualizing section is followed by a discussion of a series of illustrative moments where affective infection plays part in *Love's Labour's Lost*, through which I argue that Shakespeare, via his comedy, offers a particularly strong spatial form to the prevailing gendered rhetoric. By looking at these moments in a chronological sequence, the paper traces how the enclosed, gendered spaces evolve through the men's early resistance (forming the academe), to budding love (being influenced by the women's eyes and dissolving the academe), to a failure in spatial synthesis (the spaces of men and women are never conjoined). The reading challenges the seemingly traditional division into male and female spheres by attending to the interrelationships and blurring of these spaces through the imagery of faces, vision, and light.

2. Spherology of faces, vision, and light

In his phenomenological treatise *Bubbles*, the first volume of his monumental *Spheres* trilogy (*Sphären-Trilogie*, 1998–2004), Sloterdijk investigates the ways that intimate and shared space is formed between individuals.[5] While Heidegger argued that human existence is fundamentally temporal, Sloterdijk lays weight on the spatiality of existence. At large, he attempts to move beyond the notion of subject autonomy toward an understanding of a more heterogenous reality, *Bubbles* being an analysis of hybridity and cohabitation at its most intimate or "microspheric" level. To simplify the argument, humans fundamentally exist

[5] For a previous and, to my knowledge, the first implementation of Sloterdijk's "spherology" in Shakespeare studies, see Wilson (2015), where the author discusses the rotundity of the Globe Theater in light of globalization with the help of the second volume of Sloterdijk's *Spheres* trilogy, *Globes*. See also Hollis (2022). As opposed to the macrospherical focus of *Globes*, the present article focuses more on the microspheric processes discussed in the trilogy's first volume, *Bubbles*.

in intersubjective relationships in microspheres of mutual influence. A particularly concrete example would be a fetus in a mother's womb, but *Bubbles* expands from this to cover a wider field of cultural and other manifestations of microspheric units (Sloterdijk 2011, 62–64). His discussion of Renaissance art and the manifestations of space between two people looking one another in the eye is particularly resonant. Sloterdijk uses as examples paintings from the Italian Renaissance, especially those by Giotto (1267–1337) and Ambrogio Lorenzetti (c. 1290–1348), which depict intimate Biblical scenes. These paintings show, for instance, the golden halos of Mary and Jesus merging as the two face each other (Lorenzetti's *Madonna Enthroned with Child and Saints*), and similar visual merging of intimate space is seen when Mary's mother, Anne, embraces her husband Joachim (Giotto's *Legend of Saint Joachim, Meeting at the Golden Gate*). On the other hand, when there is no intimacy between the gazers, Giotto depicts this as spatial failure, as we can see in *Kiss of Judas*, where the halo of Jesus is portrayed almost as if in retreat from Judas, whose face is pressed toward the face of Jesus. While the two look each other in the eye, the betrayal makes the formation of any interfacial and shared space impossible (Sloterdijk 2011, 146–57).

These pictorial representations of Biblical interfacial spheres are in unison with the astrological observations of the Renaissance philosopher Marsilio Ficino (1433–99), whose ideas Sloterdijk touches on and which, most importantly for my purposes, resonate across *Love's Labour's Lost*, too. Ficino was a key figure in the revival of Plato's Academy in Florence, and so is connected to the continuance of "male academes" from antiquity to the early modern period. Drawing on Ficino, Sloterdijk extrapolates on what is now known as the (scientifically outdated) emission theory:

> According to well-known Platonic doctrine, seeing does not simply mean being affected by impressions of illuminated objects, but rather actively directing visual rays at them. The eye is itself sun-like to the extent that it illuminates objects with a light *sui generis*. The visual rays shoot forth like the projectiles of a cognitive artillery, and the existing, espied world is the bull's eye. […] When the gazes of humans meet, the space between their eyes is compacted into a highly charged radiation field and becomes the scene of a micro-drama of energies; interpenetrations must develop between gaze and counter-gaze, and it is the stronger gaze that injects its content […] into the other's eye. (2011, 214)

According to emission theory, then, seeing consists of rays directed by the gaze at the object, and in this the eye resembles the sun in its ability to illuminate. When two gazes meet, the space between them becomes "a highly charged radiation field" and "the scene of a micro-drama of energies," in which "interpenetrations must develop between gaze and counter-gaze." In the formation of shared space, according to the theory, considerable significance and agency is thus given to the eye beams. While this idea may sound poetical but absurd to us today, it had, according to Sloterdijk, real relevance in the time of Ficino as well as in the time of Shakespeare.

The experiental world of the early modern period, Sloterdijk contends, is characterized by "a restless play of affective infections" (2011, 207), in which other people's attention and emotions break the impression of subject autonomy. Corresponding to the penetrating potential of eye beams, this process can also be seen to function as a disease one might need to protect oneself from. This gives rise to the immunological dimension of microspheres:

> Anyone seeking alternatives to an existence in stoical self-sufficiency or individual self-arrest in front of the mirror would do well to recall an epoch in which all reflection on the *condition humana* was pervaded by the evidence that between humans, whether in familiar proximity or on the open market, a restless play of affective infections was in progress. [...] [T]he interpersonal space was overcrowded with symbiotic, erotic and mimetic-competitive energies that fundamentally deny the illusion of subject autonomy. The central law of intersubjectivity as experienced in premodern attitudes is the enchantment of humans through humans. (2011, 207)

Amidst the flux of energies in interpersonal space, then, humans were seen as continuously enchanted by one another. The sense of solitary existence, perhaps more common in our world today, would not have been as prevalent in early modern times, when subjects were in unceasing interrelations with(in) their communities and families. And sharing space would certainly entail sharing diseases, too, long before modern advances on hygiene.[6]

In addition to Renaissance art and Ficino as discussed by Sloterdijk,

[6] Whether the fear of pollution or disease is actual or rather a culturally produced fear of the other has for long been a topic in anthropology and philosophy, most famously in Mary Douglas's *Purity and Danger* (1966) and more recently in, for example, Olli Lagerspetz's *A Philosophy of Dirt* (2018). In *Love's Labour's Lost*, Shakespeare certainly shows a cultural (and gendered) fear of being "polluted" by the opposing sex.

the same idea of emission theory can be seen in the literary works of authors Shakespeare would have been familiar with, such as Petrarch through his early English translators.[7] Visual beams, with all their metaphorical potential in relation to astrology and men, are indeed already manifest in the sonnets of Petrarch, available in Shakespeare's day, for instance, in Sir Thomas Wyatt's translations in *Tottel's Miscellany* (1557). In "The louer describeth his being striken with sight of his loue," the speaker gives a vivid portrayal of the emissions by complaining how

> The liuely sparkes, that issue from those eyes,
> Against the which there vaileth no defence,
> Haue perst my hart, and done it none offence,
> With quakyng pleasure, more then once or twise.
> Was neuer man could any thing deuise,
> Sunne beames to turn with so great vehemence
> To dase mans sight, as by their bright presence
> Dased am I, much like vnto the gise
> Of one striken with dint of lightenyng,
> Blind with the stroke, and errying here and there.
>
> (Petrarch 2005, 91–92)

The male speaker is defenseless against the lively sparks issuing from the female lover's eyes.[8] These sparks, compared to the beams of the sun, pierce his heart (his innermost core) by way of ocular influence. He is dazed as if struck by lightning: such is the potential effect of love-through-the-eyes. Other translations of Petrarch in the *Miscellany* prove how pervading the idea of ocular influence was. In another of Wyatt's renderings, an image familiar to readers of *Love's Labour's Lost* arises in the female lover whose blazing gaze only an eagle could look directly at: "Some fowles there be, that haue so perfit sight / Against the sunne their eies for to defend" (Petrarch 2005, 93). Similar resonances with Shakespeare's play, particularly in relation to the disguising of the women's faces and the ending songs of the seasons, may be seen

[7] Mazzio (2009) astutely shows how the proliferation of textbooks, dictionaries, and other print products related to the rhetoric of love in Shakespeare's time generally influenced *Love's Labour's Lost*, whereas the present article is more particularly concerned with the Petrarchan phenomenon of the (female) beloved's eyes.

[8] For the ways Wyatt radically mistranslated Petrarch, see Glaser (1984). In the case of "The lively sparks," Glaser notes how Wyatt adds to Petrarch's original "a good Kentish thunderstorm" and exaggerates the blinding quality of the lady's eyes (219). Generally, Glaser argues, Wyatt renders Petrarch with "disillusioned pessimism" (220). Therefore, it is important to note that when referring to the resonances between Petrarch and *Love's Labour's Lost*, the influence might rather stem from the English renderings than the Italian originals.

in Henry Howard's translation of the sonnet "Complaint that his ladie after she knew of his loue kept her face alway hidden from him," in which the male lover mourns the loss of light from her lover's gaze: "In somer, sunne: in winters breath, a frost: / Wherby the light of her faire lokes I lost" (Petrarch 2005, 90).

In his *Amoretti* (1595), Shakespeare's contemporary Edmund Spenser was similarly preoccupied with the beaming and projectile influence of a woman's eyes. By my count, at least 29 of the 89 sonnets in the cycle allude to Elizabeth Boyle's eyes, often but not only in the sense of emission. Her bright beams can shoot darts (sonnet 8), lighten his darkness (sonnet 9), and contain little flying cupids (sonnet 16); her glance is likened to gliding arrows (sonnet 17); her smile and eyelids are compared to sunshine clearing out the storm (sonnet 40); her eyes shoot a thousand arrows to his heart (sonnet 57) and even have the potential to kill (sonnets 10 and 49). The examples could go on. The speaker relents only when he begins to lose his own vision in the penultimate sonnet 88: "mine eyes doe blynd" (Spenser 1912, 577). These examples suggest that in writing *Love's Labour's Lost* Shakespeare was clearly aware of the ongoing poetic tradition referring to these emissions, derived from Petrarch, which he then turned into comedy in the personas of the affected noblemen. What is more, Shakespeare appears to use that tradition to give a spatial form to the rhetorical love tradition, as the allegedly interior academicians are unable to resist the influence of the eyes of the exterior French women. Male identity, temporarily corresponding with the space of the academe, is under threat from the outside. The following sections will elaborate through key moments of early resistance, intermediate desire, and late death how Shakespeare negotiates these affective infections of the eyes.

3. From early resistance to intermediate desire

When the King of Navarre lays out the plan of "the little academe" (1.1.13) by asking his fellows to "war against your own affections / And the huge army of the world's desires" (1.1.9–10), Shakespeare already signals the play's core theme of self-immurement against alluring outside influence.[9] From the King's promise of eternal fame (1.1.1–7) as the academe's predominant goal to a reading of its strict decrees, the

[9] All quotations from *Love's Labour's Lost* are taken from the third Arden edition, edited by H. R. Woudhuysen (Shakespeare 1998).

negotiation of the proposed enclosed space is there to delineate the spatial boundaries between the academe and the femininely gendered outside.[10] The decrees address a severe patriarchal system in which those wielding power inside, men, administer extreme physical violence against those subjugated outside, women: the decree "That no woman shall come within a mile of my court [...] On pain of losing her tongue" (1.1.119–20; 1.1.122–23) directly assigns punishment to women who come near the academe. It is noteworthy how this statute, resonant with *Titus Andronicus* in which Lavinia is brutally molested outside, is not directed to the bookmen themselves but to the potential *other* infiltrating – or polluting – the enclosed space. Instead of regulating the behavior of the men inside, the statute turns attention outside and effects violence there. The severing of the tongue is highly symbolic in a play concerned with verbal exuberance, and the gendered nature of this law underscores how women's ability to communicate is to be controlled. What is more, the academe represents a fantasy of immunity and purity, a safe zone promoting not biologically but culturally reasoned arguments against (female) pollution.

However, the very idea of the study space is problematized by Berowne. Responding to the impossible demands of the austere project, he develops a line of thought according to which women's eyes, following the Petrarchan tradition, are a source of light akin to the sun, and hence a gateway to the truth the men are seeking to find through study. "Light seeking light doth light of light beguile," he says,

> So, ere you find where light in darkness lies,
> Your light grows dark by losing of your eyes.
> Study me how to please the eye indeed,
> By fixing it upon a fairer eye,

[10] While the ascetic inconveniences of the academe would suggest an otherworldly, spiritual goal, I am inclined to agree with Maus, who notes the shift of humanist education during the sixteenth century from the churchmen to aristocrats as integral to *Love's Labour's Lost* (1991, 208). The King's aim would thus not be the dissolution of the self and the opening up of infinite space, as in the traditional forms of contemplation. Instead, the King "imagines himself," Maus writes, "undergoing the contemplative life as if it were a heroic ordeal, emerging victorious and universally admired. Self-mortification becomes a means of self-exaltation, a way to acquire the traditional aristocratic desiderata, honor and fame" (1991, 208). The King's call for "fame" (1.1.1) to be "registered upon our brazen tombs" (1.1.2) suggests precisely this rather than a spiritual end as such. There certainly is the fear of death, too – "cormorant devouring time" (1.1.4) with its "scythe's keen edge" (1.1.6) – yet the ultimate ambition is to make eternal – "make us heirs of all eternity" (1.1.7) – the heroic ordeals of the academicians. The spiritual origins of humanist education have thus become somewhat perverted in the aristocratic space of Navarre, which in turn reflects the changing times in early modern education. Humanist learning was now accessible to a tier of society that was separate from the church, and Shakespeare looks into the comedic potential of that spatial shift from church to court.

> Who dazzling so, that eye shall be his heed,
> And give him light that it was blinded by.
>
> (1.1.77–83)

Berowne disputes that excessive reading, by which the men strive to become *enlightened*, will only lead them to blindness, and that they should rather veer their eyes to women's eyes, which, if looked at ("be his heed"), can similarly blind men's eyes due to their brightness, but which also have the *illuminating* power to then *light up* men's eyes. This playful rhetoric on light, eyesight, and blindness is not only a feat of assonant fireworks, but it more importantly establishes the ever-present role in the play of eyes as tools of spatial influence, a means by which later in *Love's Labour's Lost* men and women contest and conquer space.

A series of spatial expansions ensues when the Princess of France together with her ladies arrive on the grounds of Navarre and the courtiers are challenged by the alluring arrivals. With regard to these expansions, Carroll (1976, 167) usefully – and preceding Sloterdijk's spherology by more than twenty years – envisioned the play's structure as concentric circles, which could, to an extent, be seen to correspond to the German phenomenologist's notion of expanding microspheres. Following this idea of rings, the play has now, in Act Two, moved from the innermost ring of the King's mind detailing his constricted vision of the academe to the broader ring encircling the first: the space immediately behind the walls of the court. It is as though Berowne's appeal to "unlock the little gate" (1.1.109) has prompted the change in circumstances and conjured the chance to bring elements from the outside into the court. This is literally what would happen, if only the embassy was shown in. The Princess, however, has heard of the noblemen's pact:

> [...] Navarre hath made a vow
> Till painful study shall outwear three years
> No woman may approach his silent court.
> Therefore to's seemeth it a needful course,
> Before we enter his forbidden gates,
> To know his pleasure[.]
>
> (2.1.22–27)

The "forbidden gates" resound with Berowne's earlier reference to the "little gate," which remains closed and locked in his image. The court

remains "silent" sans women's disrupting tongues, maintaining the echo of Lavinia's severed tongue. Besides adding a layer of the immediate outside environment to the play, the arrival of the Princess also suggests a further spatial expansion. The Princess has, after all, arrived in Navarre in order to negotiate serious economic and geopolitical issues regarding the ownership of Aquitaine, and thus she introduces the broader geographical reality of Europe into the world of the play. The debate around Aquitaine brought up by the Princess adds another spatial layer to the trunk of *Love's Labour's Lost*, heightening the idea that the women of the play have the potential to open the enclosed male sphere from which the play begins.

The men's process from their early resistance to eventual desire is signaled through Boyet's eye-filled rhetoric. When the Princess asks why the men have fallen in love with them, Boyet develops an extended image of spatio-ocular influence, worth quoting at length to see how, in his rhetoric, the court space is transformed by the eyes. "Why," he says,

> [...] all his behaviours did make their retire
> To the court of his eye, peeping thorough desire.
> His heart, like an agate with your print impressed,
> Proud with his form, in his eye pride expressed.
> His tongue, all impatient to speak and not see,
> Did stumble with haste in his eyesight to be.
> All senses to that sense did make their repair,
> To feel only looking on fairest of fair.
> Methought all his senses were locked in his eye, [...]
> His face's own margin did verse such amazes
> That all eyes saw his eyes enchanted with gazes.
>
> (2.1.233–41; 2.1.245–46)

Besides invoking the heart as the innermost component of man (safely enclosed in the breast like its carrier's male autonomy within the walls of his court), it is the spatialized eye that is striking here. Boyet depicts how affection has entered "the court of his eye," an ambiguous image which nevertheless underscores the connection drawn between the space and the organ, the latter figuring as a passageway to the former. The heart, then, is imprinted with the image of the Princess, and his heart's contentment is expressed in his eye. All his senses are now expressed through (and even "locked in") his eye, which is fixed on "fairest of fair," the eye of the Princess. By the verse's final rhyming couplet, it has become clear how the King's facial features, especially

the eyes, express his affection for the Princess, and there is a sense of the gazes of the two meeting. This moment, where "all eyes saw his eyes enchanted with gazes," marks the embryonic state of the interfacial sphere forming between the two characters. Crucial to this development of affection is also the sense of infection, which Boyet, in the same scene, reports to the Princess: "Navarre is infected" (2.1.227) by "that which we lovers entitle 'affected'" (2.1.231).

The sense of increasing interfaciality, developed through eye contact, is most palpably evinced in the sequence of sonnets read out in Act Four. Having now fallen in love, the men of court turn into sonneteers and express their passion through comically bad poems – the woman's eye as the sun was a Renaissance trope that Shakespeare used elsewhere, too, most notably in sonnet 130 ("My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun"). While the sonnets are of comically questionable literary merit, they are nevertheless saturated with the type of imagery that is resonant with the ocular tradition dating back to Ficino and Petrarch. Berowne's sonnet to Rosaline, which is the first of four to be exposed, is most directly aligned with the female eye-lightning we saw in Petrarch's "The louer describeth" versed earlier:

> Study his bias leaves, and makes his book thine eyes,
> Where all those pleasures live, that art would comprehend. […]
> Thy eye Jove's lightning bears, thy voice his dreadful thunder,
> Which, not to anger bent, is music and sweet fire.
>
> (4.2.109–10; 4.2.115–16)

Books are again compared to the eyes, the latter now spatialized, in an anti-Stoical fashion, as a site "Where all those pleasures live" that are not obtainable by studying. The lightning strikes, followed by the sound of thunder, as in Wyatt's rendering of Petrarch, resulting in a "sweet fire" that anticipates Berowne's climactic allusion to Promethean fire later in the same act. The King's sonnet to the Princess, exposed next, similarly reverberates with ocular radiance, to an extent where he explicitly refers to the "eye-beams" and their "fresh rays":

> So sweet a kiss the golden sun gives not
> To those fresh morning drops upon the rose,
> As thy eye-beams when their fresh rays have smote
> The night of dew that on my cheeks down flows.
>
> 4.3.23–26

By evoking "the golden sun" in reference to her eyes, the King draws a conceptual link between two globes: the astronomical one and the ocular one, directing attention to the sphericality of both. The sense of spherical roundness is also signaled, although less evidently, in the pathos-filled image of the tear drops on his cheeks. Amidst this slew of globular images the notion of enclosed male space is compromised as the rhetorical female sphericity is allowed to seize control, resulting in a blurring of gendered spatial boundaries as her "eye-beams" are able to burn off the "dew" on his cheeks.

Next, in Longaville's sonnet to Maria, Shakespeare similarly highlights the influence of radial female eyes and retains the King's association of eyes with the spheres. This sonnet may be viewed as a culmination of the interfacial and spherical arguments thus far in the play:

> Did not the heavenly rhetoric of thine eye,
> 'Gainst whom the world cannot hold argument,
> Persuade my heart to this false perjury? [...]
> Vows are but breath, and breath a vapour is:
> Then thou, fair sun, which on my earth dost shine,
> Exhal'st this vapour-vow; in thee it is.
>
> (4.3.57–59; 4.3.65–67)

The first image, once again, shows her eyes as having influence on his heart, but the second image develops a more striking argument of spherical import as she is likened to a sun having a direct, aerial connection via her shine to his earth, an image similar to the "eye-beams" on the King's skin versed above. Two globes come together in a figure where her orb breathes into his orb: her sun and his earth are conjoined. In contrast, the final sonnet, by Dumaine to Katherine, is distinctly devoid of such imagery, and is also, in other respects, detached from the three prior sonnets for swapping the iambic pentameter for trochaic tetrameter, this change in meter reflecting a change in imagery. Nevertheless, the four-fold sequence of exaggerated love poetry, often fun in production, figures as a demonstration that the male space of the court has been permeated by outside influence by way of women's eyes. Longaville's heart has been influenced by "the heavenly rhetoric of [Maria's] eye," the King is amazed by the Princess' "eye-beams" with "their fresh rays," and Berowne is shaken by Rosaline's eyes that carry the power of "Jove's lightning." Elements from the outside world have thus entered the academe.

All the rhetoric on ocular-radial influence culminates in Berowne's long speech, in which we see at least two aspects that further define the mechanisms of infatuation: the corporal effect of the eyes, and the image of the eyes as Promethean fire. The first feature centers on the bodily influence of the eyes, including its potential to infect, which conceptually connects to the all-pervading power of a woman's love that is hazardous to male autonomy:

> But love, first learned in a lady's eyes,
> Lives not alone immured in the brain
> But with the motion of all elements
> Courses as swift as thought in every power
> And gives to every power a double power,
> Above their functions and their offices.
> It adds a precious seeing to the eye:
> A lover's eyes will gaze an eagle blind.
>
> (4.3.301–8)

What Berowne touches on here is a crucial bodily influence of love, and once again he stands against the idea of spatial restriction. He remarks how love is not enclosed within walls ("immured") in the brain but rather that it swiftly runs throughout the body and affects (and perhaps even infects, like a fever coursing through) the whole bodily system, indeed doubling the power of every faculty. Berowne's praising words on how love alters every faculty in man are strikingly contradictory to what I have argued the academe stands for as an ostensibly immune sphere. In the second noteworthy feature of the speech, Berowne recapitulates his main argument with a direct reference to the contest between ocular influence and the monastic withdrawal to an enclosed space:

> 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[.]
>
> (4.3.324–27)

Women's eyes are spatialized as something that "show, contain and nourish all the world," just as earlier in the play Berowne had remarked on their enlightening potential. Therein lies the correct path to wisdom as opposed to "the books, the arts, the academes."[11] The image of

[11] There are some crucial differences to be found in the F (1623) and Q2 (1631) versions of Berowne's

the "Promethean fire" inventively conjoins the notions of Promethean (light-bearing) wisdom and Petrarchan (light-radiating) influence of the woman's sun-like eyes. Berowne's speech concludes the interrogations and reasonings regarding the nature of infatuation, after which the lords and the King conspicuously let go of their independence and allow their spaces to be merged with the women outside. The metaphorical level, according to the men, is now supposed to be transposed to the bodily level – albeit without the women's consent, as the men completely overlook female agency, an issue I will return to below.

However, once convinced by the women that their idea of love is faulty, the men abandon their idealization of womanhood in a slew of imagery related to infection and insects. Although Berowne still retains the Petrarchism near the midpoint of the final scene – "When we greet, / With eyes' best seeing, heaven's fiery eye, / By light we lose light" (5.2.375–76) – he is finally convinced by Rosaline that superfluous demonstrations of affection will not work. It is here where Berowne develops a line of thought in which falling in love, with all the superfluities it brings about, is likened first to insects and then to infection: "these summer flies / Have blown me full of maggot ostentation" (5.2.408–9). It is as though the letting-in of outside influences into the academe has brought with it something from the natural environment as well, as the play has no such references to insects (apart from Moth's multivalent name) prior to the infatuation. The masculine core of the court space has been compromised. These images from the natural world are then switched to ones of infection, when Berowne admits to his alleged sickness, promises to get better, and blames the other noblemen for still being diseased:

> [...] Bear with me, I am sick;
> I'll leave it by degrees. Soft, let us see:
> Write "Lord have mercy on us" on those three.
> They are infected; in their hearts it lies;
> They have the plague and caught it of your eyes.
>
> (5.2.417–21)

speech when compared to Q1 (1598) used in this article. The Promethean passage, for instance, reads: "From women's eyes this doctrine I derive: / They are the ground, the books, the academes, / From whence doth spring the true Promethean fire" (Shakespeare 1998, 341). "The arts" is switched to "the ground," which makes the line contain not one but two spatial images (the ground and the academes), and the "sparkle still" of the fire is lost and replaced with "spring," the more fire-related version of course retaining a better sense of the conjoined image of the sun and the myth of Prometheus.

Here, near the end of the play, Shakespeare returns to an explicit reference to love as infection, first introduced by Boyet in Act Two when he notes how "Navarre is infected" (2.1.229) by being "affected" (2.1.231). Both Boyet and Berowne signal the culturally produced fear of the polluting other. The delusionary autonomous sphere of the academe is brought into question as female sphericity – as symbolized by the rounded shape of the eye and the sun and together imagined as "sun-beamed eyes" (5.2.170) – endangers the self-governing state of the court space. The eye beams are metaphorically able to breach boundaries as when the Princess' ocular shine can dry the tears on the King's cheeks. Much of this is played with great comedy, as in any production of the play the men's deluded exaltation of the eyes is bound to sound ridiculous.

The men believe that an interfacial and shared sphere is on the brink of formation here, near the end of the play, a moment akin to the intimacy witnessed in the paintings of Giotto and Lorenzetti. However, by supposing that the women's eyes become the new books and rhetoric, the men only perpetuate the idea of an unrealistic and one-sided burning love, much in the spirit of Renaissance sonnetry influenced by Petrarch, in which excessive rhetoricity tends to say more about the male speaker rather than the female beloved (Fineman 1986, 5–6). The play seems to suggest that until the men learn to look into the women's eyes and see the women, not the sunny reflection of their own longing mirrored back in a way which blinds them, true love is impossible. Thus the result of their deluded thinking, as we will see, will be closer to Giotto's *Kiss of Judas*, in which the interfacial sphere is not shared, compared to the willingly shared tenderness in Lorenzetti's *Madonna Enthroned* or Giotto's *Legend of Saint Joachim*. How the men fail to synthesize the gendered spaces – to transpose their metaphorical and one-sided connection with women to a bodily level – is the topic of the following section.

4. Late death and expanded horizons

The impossibility of shared space is signaled prior to its explicit voicing at the very end of the play. The women's refusal is anticipated during the masque, as they display their unwillingness to be wooed by the men by concealing their faces and thus limiting the men's access to interfaciality. Berowne and the King, dressed as Muscovites, and having not quite yet realized how faulty their vision of idealized womanhood

is, enter into dialogue with the masked Rosaline, and the result is again a play on the idea of the face as the sun, though Rosaline talks of her face as another celestial body, the moon, only reflecting the brightness of the Princess' light:

BEROWNE. Vouchsafe to show the sunshine of your face,
That we like savages may worship it.
ROSALINE. My face is but a moon and clouded too.
KING. Blessed are clouds, to do as such clouds do.
Vouchsafe, bright moon, and these thy stars, to shine –
Those clouds removed – upon our watery eyne.
(5.2.201–6)

By evoking the moon, Rosaline is not only evoking another spherical object but also suggesting an old hierarchy in which women can only ever reflect man's light (playing on the homophonous sun/son pair). While the opposite is true in the world of the play in the sense that it is the women carrying the light, the traditional sense of women as moon and men as sun can be read in her reply to Berowne. This sense is also felt a few lines later when the King says "she is the moon and I the man" (5.2.215), man in the moon being a proverbial image derived from the Bible, here distorted by the King by his gendering of the sphere. Nevertheless, the concealment of the faces is a severe problem for the men who have just been idealizing women's gazes to a hyperbolic extent. The King pleads access to the faciality of Rosaline (the moon) as well as that of the other women (the stars) in order for them to shine properly "upon [the men's] watery eyne." As silly as Berowne's appeal is by this point in the play, his words meaningfully connect the sphericity of celestial bodies to the sphericity of eyes. Berowne and the King wish these rounded objects to be commingled.

Whenever the men look into the women's eyes, however, they project their own feelings onto them and, in the process, neglect to take any female agency into account. Indeed, in their attempt to explain their excessive affection, the men's eye-related justifications are reminiscent of what today would be called victim-blaming. "The virtue of your eye must break my oath" (5.2.348) is what the King offers as an explanation, and what is echoed later by Berowne, according to whom love is, again, "Formed by the eye" (5.2.756) that simply observes its surroundings and cannot help if met with women's eyes that are to blame for the men's affection and forsworn oaths: "Those heavenly eyes that look

into these faults, / Suggested us to make" (5.2.763–64). These are the men's justifications for exerting spatial power in the scene, and for these reasons, rooted in the emission theory that lends credence to the idea that eyes have such power, the men imagine themselves to have access to the women's spaces.

Yet the entrance of Marcadé switches the play's tone toward tragedy and intimates a drastic spatial shift in the play, one where spatial fusion is impossible. What the Princess suggests to the King is a complete spatial separation for a year, as she asks him to detach himself from his space of rule by travelling to "some forlorn and naked hermitage / Remote from all the pleasures of the world" (5.2.798–99). By asking the King to enter an "austere insociable life" (5.2.793) with "frosts and fasts, hard lodging and thin weeds" (5.2.795), the Princess is not only evoking the original ascetic spirit of the men's academe that the King failed to maintain but, more importantly, she is asking the King to remove himself from the enclosed space of the court and expand his spatial horizons.

Similar spatial negotiations are under way with the other prospective pairs, with similarly hopeless results for the men, engendering an even stronger sense of spatial separation. When Rosaline offers a deal to Berowne, he continues to appeal to her through an image of the spatialized eye: "Mistress, look on me. / Behold the window of my heart, mine eye" (5.2.825–26). The succinct imperative, "look on me," is dramatically powerful, suggesting Berowne is being particularly serious here. What has been insinuated throughout the rhetorical fireworks of the play involving eyes as apertures to the man's heart is now directly vocalized by Berowne's reference to the eye as the heart's window. This is Berowne's final attempt to create an interfacial sphere with Rosaline. Her request to Berowne recalls that of the Princess to the King, though Rosaline's offer is less "insociable" and more altruistic and empathetic for the benefit of the sick:

> You shall this twelvemonth term from day to day
> Visit the speechless sick and still converse
> With groaning wretches; and your task shall be
> With all the fierce endeavour of your wit
> To enforce the pained impotent to smile.
>
> (5.2.838–42)

What is significant here, like in the request of the Princess, is the spatial severance from the court and the shift to a completely new environment,

which Berowne comments on in his reply: "befall what will befall, / I'll jest a twelvemonth in an hospital" (5.2.858–59). Rosaline appears to consider empathy as a significant factor in Berowne's development, as though testing his ability to develop into a person capable of truly accepting others, to move beyond the self-referentiality seen in his prior behavior as one of the sonneteers. Remarkably, too, from the viewpoint of the interfacial spheres, Rosaline asks Berowne to "enforce the pained impotent to smile." Whether "impotent" carries a sexual undertone is unclear but, in a play so wholly concerned with the heat of love, such connotation would not be surprising. Be that as it may, the inability to smile (in other words, the inability to create meaningful and amiable interfaciality) and the lack of sexual power both resonate with a core concern of the play, that of a conjoined space shared by lovers.

While such shared spatiality is not reached at the end of the play, and it is easy to agree with Mark Breitenberg (1992, 446) that male desire is only reinforced by the once again delayed gratification, something has nonetheless changed. The switch from amorous wordplay in the court of Navarre into utilitarian deeds at distant destinations marks a foundational change in the spatial politics of *Love's Labour's Lost*. Promising to detach themselves from court space, the men initiate a change from immune enclosedness to a new reality among (infective) diseases and death. With the introduction of death – as another ring in the play's concentric circle (Carroll 1976, 167) – the men's spatial horizons are broadened from the academe's delusional aspirations of everlasting life to the world far beyond the court, one that encompasses mortality. The spherical import of death is noteworthy, as Sloterdijk considers death as "the initial sphere expander" leading "to the formation of cultures or 'societies' in the first place" (2014, 176). He thus argues for death as the necessary stepping stone in evolving a microsphere into a macrosphere, a progression which, in the case of *Love's Labour's Lost*, refers to the possibility that the bookmen's idea of an enclosed sphere of an academe expands into a macrosphere that receives what is perceived as the other. This other is a more realistic world, a world incorporating insects, death, as well as infective affections with other people.

5. Conclusion

According to Sloterdijk's idea of spherology, "the basic effort of all social units is casting out evil from the inside and securing the borders" and

thus "creat[ing] the divide between the good and internal to the bad and external" (2014, 177). Applying these tenets to *Love's Labour's Lost*, then, enables us to understand the play's spatial dynamics in a little more detail. In this reading, the academe aligns with the larger question of gendered identity in relation to space, where men are locked inside, wishing to form spheres of their own. Playing with the Petrarchan trope of ray-emitting eyes as per early modern emission theory, Shakespeare shows how such self-immurement is impossible at the end, as the men end up projecting their need for spherical expansion by waxing lyrical about the women, not realizing they are only projecting their own deluded visions of women and female agency. They similarly project what Mazzio (2009, 146) has called "the systematic introjection not so much of qualities of the beloved as of qualities of textuality more generally," as the men perpetuate clichés seen in books related to the rhetoric of love prevalent in Shakespeare's day. Only by discarding these deluded notions – reflected in the "taffeta phrases" of their sonneteering (5.2.406) – and coming to grips with the reality where death and sickness are acknowledged, can they truly strive toward a shared space.

With these considerations in mind, and against what scholars have traditionally said about the play, *Love's Labour's Lost* strikes me as rather plot-heavy, at least if we are willing to consider the play's rhetorical depth, in which the movement from insular to shared space is so vivaciously depicted, as integral to its plot.[12] Pater's "series of pictorial groups" (1901, 162–63) turn out to contain dynamic and complex negotiations of spatial interrelations, as seen in all the allegedly feminine visual rays the men believe can breach their space. These insights can be applied more broadly in early modern and Shakespeare studies as well. If *Love's Labour's Lost* is a play of youthful courtship, the academe standing as "a notional framework for masculine development, a way of imagining how boys become men" (Keilen 2021, 152), then the implications of spherology for Shakespeare's negotiations of mature cohabitation remain to be explored. Since *Love's Labour's Lost* ends by showing how "the first bubble bursts" and how the men are on the brink of "becom[ing] inhabitants of an expanded psycho-sociosphere" (Sloterdijk

[12] The subplots, which for limitations of space have not been untangled in this essay, similarly address gendered spatiality, even if less through the prevalent early modern rhetoric of vision and light and more through the physical locations in and outside of the court space. For instance, Holofernes and Sir Nathaniel can be seen to represent what a life led in enclosed male study spaces can amount to, whereas Jaquenetta's sexuality and relations with Costard are associated with the more natural space outside (but still under the control) of the court.

2011, 54), the familial anxieties in, say, *King Lear*, or the geopolitical catastrophes of *Richard II* call for further inquiry, as the plays express their concerns with a rhetoric that is not without spheric resonance.

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