1. Introduction

Gerhild Scholz Williams and Stephan K. Schindler

This volume contains the amended papers presented at the Twelfth St. Louis Symposium on German Literature in April 1994. Scholars from the United States and Germany had been invited to explore the ways in which early modern people produced and organized knowledge, how they encoded science, and how this encoding appeared in literature.

Early modern Europe experienced much political, social, and religious upheaval as competing claims about the purpose, methods, and authority of knowledge vied for public attention. Popular knowledge, pseudosciences, information produced and guarded by the scholarly elites, and knowledge about the nature of God, about the natural world, about man and woman were transmitted orally or in written form. They all demanded scholarly and princely attention and public status. Print communication, information about astrological predictions, doctrinal struggles, and political jealousies and ambitions responded to and influenced the struggle for dominance among learned and lay communities. When confronted with new, foreign, or seemingly strange systems of knowledge—as was the case with discoveries, the witchcraze, the reforming movements, and the changing perceptions about sex, gender, and the body—many traditions and time-honored opinions had to be defended against these intruding and competing epistemologies.

Struggling to collect and organize information from around the world, scholars produced immense compendia of knowledge that were increasingly looked upon as property, to be protected from unauthorized copying and selling. The licensing and censoring of knowledge as a cultural product that was subject to political, social, religious, and economic changes became a growing concern among the political and religious elites (Tennant).

Science represents the attempt to systematize and schematize knowledge and information, sharing with both the inescapable effects of the same epochal shifts and changes. Renaissance science, whether it was articulated in Kepler's poetic inspirations (Jaeger), in Bruno's Platonism (Haug), or in Kircher's efforts to reconcile geography and microscopy
with theology (Strasser), reacted to the interconnectedness of science and knowledge by producing numerous discursive options.

Early modern scholars struggled to fit received knowledge into concepts of the wondrous, the magical, and even the satanic within the precepts of contemporary scientific understanding, confirming thereby that knowledge was local, historical, and plural. The vast compendia of knowledge they produced associate the real with the fictitious (Cramer) to render authoritative the results of their labors. Nothing was too remote or too distant that it did not merit study and classification. This included demonology, the academic and scientific study of demons, magic, and witchcraft (Williams).

In all cases under discussion here we observe the attempt of science to advance knowledge in the interest of specific political groups and social classes. Rather than serving as a transcendental force for progress, science affirms claims to power. It does so most insistently if these claims are articulated by wealthy burghers, the nobility, or the Holy Roman Emperor himself (Müller).

Metaphors that explicate changes in early modern media, such as the transfer from manuscript to book culture, serve as a reminder of the historicity of discourse and of discursive representation (Wenzel). Renaissance invention of historicity established new sites of intellectual authority. With it came new techniques of inquiry and of self-presentation, and new fields of intellectual endeavor (Kaufmann).

Knowledge, as a "cultural anthropology of thought," interconnects all levels of discourse and all fields of inquiry; it is inscribed as much in cerebral, rational processes as in the historical construction of the body. Human sexuality and emotions, the affects of social discourse, the effects of social and sexual discipline imposed on the body, as well as the preoccupation with bodily functions, are incorporated into the construction of the early modern family and of the state (Tatlock, Schindler). Many modern scholars find this vast range of interaction of knowledge and science fascinating and challenging, on occasion even unsettling. However, instead of confronting and examining the great variety of discourses on love, desire, and sexuality in early modern German and Latin literature, scholars occasionally seek refuge in traditional literary analysis in an attempt to avoid probing the ideological categories that might have prompted their use. In so doing, they obscure our path toward cultural knowledge and understanding (Parente).

Knowledge on its way to becoming science generates conflicts that are communicated in a variety of discourses. This discursive multiplicity represents an abiding emotional and intellectual accomplishment of
Introduction

3

the early modern period. It furnished the basic and unifying concept of our investigations.

This book could not have been published without the generous support of Washington University and the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, which made possible the gathering of colleagues from Germany and the United States on the campus of Washington University in St. Louis. We are grateful to the anonymous readers of the manuscript for helpful comments, to Paul Roberge for expertly guiding us through the publication process, and to the University of North Carolina Press for accepting our volume for publication. We thank Lynne Tatlock for her support. Thanks are due as well to Elizabeth Fyfe and Debbie Kurtz and to the graduate students of the German Department of Washington University, especially Jennifer Drake and Troy Wiwczaroski, for their assistance.

Finally, we would like to express our deep appreciation to our colleagues and friends James F. Poag and James E. McLeod whose intelligence, creativity, unflagging encouragement, and good humor helped to build and maintain an energetic, committed, and collegial department. To them we dedicate this book on the occasion of their birthdays.

St. Louis, July 1995

Note
