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“All Cry Shame Against Me, Yet I'll Speak”: Narratological Understandings of Gender, Genre, and Speech in Shakespeare’s Infidelity Plays

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“All Cry Shame Against Me, Yet I’ll Speak”: Narratological Understandings of Gender, Genre, and Speech in Shakespeare's Infidelity Plays

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts in English

by

Anya Josephs

2019
ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

“All Cry Shame Against Me, Yet I’ll Speak”: Narratological Understandings of Gender, Genre, and Speech in Shakespeare's Infidelity Plays

by

Anya Josephs

Master of Arts in English

University of California, Los Angeles, 2019

Professor Claire McEachern, Chair

Shakespeare returns repeatedly to a false infidelity plotline in his plays. In Much Ado About Nothing, Othello, and The Winter’s Tale, a chaste woman is wrongly accused of adultery, risking her reputation and her life. I argue that the outcome of each of these plays is effected by the power of “scolding” or “shrewish” women who serve as helper-figures to the wrongfully accused heroine, and particularly by the extent to which the marginalized and critiqued female voice can make itself heard by male figures of authority. A narratological study of this phenomenon reveals significant similarities to our current cultural conversation about women’s speech, and provides a deeper understanding of what these plays have to say about speech itself and its power to transform the world, even in the hands of those most marginalized and silenced.
The thesis of Anya Josephs is approved.

Barbara Fuchs

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University of California, Los Angeles

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Introduction

Within the canon of Shakespeare’s work, perhaps no storyline is perhaps more recurrent than what I will call the “false infidelity” plot, which appears in several of the plays in a variety of modes. Although, of course, each version of it is unique, there are also striking similarities. In each, the same essential scenario is retold: a woman is credibly accused, by her jealous spouse or by some villain who influences him to do so, of adultery, and faces terrible social and physical punishment, perhaps even death, as a result. This happens in spite of her chastity, which must eventually be proven to all, forcing them, and the audience, to confront the shame of their misjudgment.

The prominence of this plot in Shakespeare’s oeuvre suggests that it is of particular thematic importance. I argue that it constitutes a certain forceful response to some of the most socially compelling ideas about gender in early modern England. Though working in a culture positively obsessed with notions of female chastity and the danger of cuckoldry, Shakespeare repeatedly dramatized the consequences of wrongfully accusing an innocent wife. The return to this plot, and the escalation in the focus on this narrative throughout Shakespeare’s lifetime, reveals an incisive critique of the male policing of female sexuality, embedded across the plays.

In addition to the prominent argument this repetition puts forward about infidelity, it also speaks to another gendered early modern obsession: the figure of the “shrew,” or “scold.” Though different in subtle shades of meaning, both these terms—leveled against female characters in many of the plays, and against historical women throughout the early modern period and onwards—suggest the importance, in the period’s discourse about gender and gender
relations, of controlling women’s speech, and the destabilizing social danger posed by women who talk too much. In this paper, I will explore the surprising consistency with which these ideas interweave with the “false infidelity” plotline, and how the appearance of the figure of the shrew within this narrative demonstrates the complexity with which Shakespeare responds to the expectations around female sexual behavior and women’s speech.

Although there are shades of the false infidelity narrative in many of the plays, it appears most prominently in *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Othello*, and *The Winter’s Tale*. By taking these three plays, with their remarkably similar plots and entirely different conclusions, as a comparative unit, we may be able to excavate some of the entrenched cultural attitudes towards gender embedded in them. Specifically, I will argue that a narratological treatment of these plays together will demonstrate, with incisively modern resonance, the importance of listening to, and believing in, women’s voices.

Today, with the rise of the #metoo movement and digital fourth-wave feminism more broadly, there is an increased awareness in our cultural sphere of how women’s voices have historically been silenced, critiqued, and disbelieved. These problems—and efforts to respond to them—are not new. Though they have transformed over the four hundred years since Shakespeare authored these plays, important currents run from their historical origins to our current moment. By better understanding the roots of the cultural pressure to silence women’s voices (particularly when they contradict male assertions about sexuality and the female body), there may be new insights into how these same pressures operate today. And, in seeing the powerful, if fictional, resistance to these norms that evolves throughout the plays, we can understand our own opposition to those pressures, not as a spontaneously generated revolution
peculiar to our historical moment, but as part of a powerful legacy of speaking against fear, silence, and shame.

To begin, I wish to consider the cultural discourses of gendered speech in which Shakespeare’s plays were intervening at the time. Any single statement about how early modern English culture treated women is necessarily a vast oversimplification, leaving out much of importance. Nonetheless, the historical record does suggest that a variety of profound and temporally specific anxieties infested early modern beliefs about women, and tended to particularly manifest themselves in literary and other cultural productions of the era. Some of these we have carried with us into the 21st century, but there are also particular early modern manifestations of even the most timeless expressions of misogyny that provide useful background for any examination of the era’s cultural attitudes towards women.

First, it is worth noting that, in early modern England as in other patriarchal cultures (including our own), the nominally powerful position of masculinity is actually affectively one of profound anxiety rather than security and contentment. In his introduction to Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England, Mark Breitenberg insightfully points out that his book’s very title is redundant: “Masculine subjectivity [under patriarchy]…inevitably engenders varying degrees of anxiety among its male members” (1). That is, under a patriarchal system that demands strict performance of gender roles from both its male and female participants, a sense of anxiety is inevitable, particularly for those individuals most responsible for upholding this hierarchy. This point will become especially significant as we consider the plays themselves, and how masculinity functions within them. The more power the play’s male characters try to wrest
away from women, the more they fear those embodied aspects of femininity—speech and sexuality—over which they can never have an absolute control.

This specific aspect of the construction of masculinity has direct ramifications in our current cultural discourses of gender. Feminist scholars today continue to demonstrate how masculinity under patriarchy harms men, as an understanding of “toxic masculinity” as a tool of patriarchal oppression has entered popular culture thanks to the work of writers like Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie. Even the American Psychiatric Institution, though it avoids the term “toxic masculinity,” recently amended its guidelines to practice with boys and men to acknowledge how “conforming to traditional masculinity ideology has been shown to limit males’ psychological development, constrain their behavior, result in gender role strain and gender role conflict,” resulting in a number of potentially severe psychological symptoms. Across scientific, scholarly, and popular understandings of feminism, there is an increasing recognition that men’s condition of social dominance is constantly uncertain and thus must provoke instability and fear in those very men who perpetuate it. We can see “toxic masculinity,” the rise of the online “redpill” and “incel” movements, and digital harassment of women who speak up against patriarchal abuses as the particular manifestations of these anxieties today.

Given their dependence on digital tools and mass media, these are, of course, very different from the anxieties surrounding male power, and women’s potential to destabilize it, that appear in Shakespeare’s plays. Nonetheless, by exploring how the latter manifests and transforms
within the plays themselves, it is possible to gain a richer understanding of how these fears have been challenged, not just today, but throughout history.\(^1\)

I will explore two particular early modern English anxieties about women’s power in some detail in this introduction. Namely, these are: cuckoldry and shrewishness. As an exploration of the three “false infidelity plays” will demonstrate, the two ideas are entangled in a complex and multifaceted relationship. Both speak to the power innate to women’s embodiment, and, perversely, increasingly lent to them by their very social disempowerment. Both are legally and religiously criminalized by the normative discourse of the period. And the condemnation of both is called into question by the narrative structure, and particularly by a narrative comparison, of the three plays under discussion here.

The perceived danger of cuckoldry provided remarkably fertile ground for early modern dramatists (and here Shakespeare is no exception). Certainly the influence of this anxiety cut a wide swathe across early modern English history, as well as the literary and cultural production of the era. After all, it was not so long before Shakespeare authored *Much Ado About Nothing*, the first of these plays, that several English queens, including the reigning monarch’s own mother, had been beheaded for the crime of adultery. The resonances of this history are writ large across the sociocultural fabric of early modern England.

Adultery was both sin and crime, religiously and socially taboo. A cursory search reveals hundreds of court records from the period describing accusations of adultery, leveled against

\(^{1}\) I will only be able to briefly touch on the much earlier origins of this history. However, it is still important to clarify that, of course, the problem of toxic masculinity and anxieties around women’s power did not spring into existence in early modern England. A broader exploration of the roots of these phenomenons is beyond the scope of this thesis, but might provide compelling further context for how they manifest today.
both men and women. Although both men and women could be, and were, tried for adultery in early modern English courts, it was also a gendered act, women being broadly considered much more responsible for adulterous liaisons than were men. Furthermore, as Johanna Rickman demonstrates in the introduction to *Love, Lust, and License in Early Modern England*, even when men were punished by law courts for adultery, the tenor of this punishment, and the ethical ideals around male and female sexual behavior it reveals, were very different. “While law courts usually punished men in seventeenth-century England for the economic transgression of producing bastards or ruining (or at least lowering) a woman’s chances for a successful marriage, women were largely punished for immorality” (2). This can be traced through the legal record, as women were frequently charged with adultery even when there were no illegitimate children involved. Instead of being a mere transgression of the laws of family and property, as male adultery was, women’s extramarital liaisons rendered them ethical and religious criminals.

I propose that this is because the act of adultery, or even the threat of it, served as a frightening reminder to men that their control over women’s bodies was not, and could never be, absolute, no matter how they attempted to make it so. Other writers have also explored this history, and it is a foundational postulate for much feminist scholarship today. Male authority *must* exert itself over women’s sexuality particularly, because male systems of authority demand inheritance be passed from father to son, and it is therefore necessary to prevent cuckoldry, which would manifest in the ultimate emasculation of raising another man’s child as one’s own. This connection is even being studied in the evolutionary sciences, where it is termed the “cuckoldry risk hypothesis”: the proposal that violent or sexually coercive behavior from men may be a deliberate “tactic to reduce the risk of extrapair paternity” (Camilleri and Quinsey 1).
The fear of cuckoldry, and particularly of adultery resulting in pregnancy and an unknown illegitimate child, may be relevant even now. However, it amounted to a cultural obsession in the early modern period. There, it stood in for deep-seated fears about women, and about the possibility of knowledge more generally. In an era of rapid transformation about epistemology, uncertainty about the nature of even divine revelation, the fear that no man could know if his child was his own took on a deep cultural weight.

Claire McEachern addresses this in her *Believing in Shakespeare: Studies in Longing*. She writes that the horns of the cuckold are an expression of a “displacement model,” a means of “transmuting some deeper fear into a more lighthearted one” (135). The fear of cuckoldry, of being the subject of mockery, can be quite comedic, perhaps standing in for the much more frightening possibility of displacement from a position of cultural power. The impossibility of perfect knowledge, the lack of a transcendent belief in any other person, the fear that we can never truly know if a beloved other means the promises they make—all these fears hover in the early modern figure of the cuckold. The existential terror that one’s own knowledge can never be absolute, and therefore that no system of social power is unshakeable, is implicit within the cultural obsession with cuckoldry, no matter how comedic it seems, at times, to be.

Another, perhaps equally resonant, cultural fear surrounded the dangers of female speech. Indeed, it is evident that the two concepts, cuckoldry and shrewishness, are interconnected, perhaps because they represent distinctive early modern attitudes towards the power women may have to destabilize patriarchal society: by being insufficiently submissive in their sexuality, or in their speech. Martin Ingram argues that, in early modern England, “scold” was a strongly negative term, in destructive impact second only to “whore”… as a pejorative label applied to
women” (34). This gestures at the interrelation between verbally and sexually excessive women that we see so strongly in the three plays under discussion. Scolds, shrews, gossips, and other categories of excessively or inappropriately verbal women were perceived as a real threat to social order. These were not private or personal misdeeds, but legally defined, and punishable, crimes. Ministers preached against them, moralists wrote pamphlets on the dangers they presented, and courts tried them as legal offenses.

They were also very much women’s crimes. There are a few cases of men being tried as scolds, but they are insignificant in number. Carol Z. Weiner cites two in the ecclesiastical records she reviewed for “Sex Roles and Crimes,” for instance. In Sandy Bardsley’s _Venomous Tongues_, she persuasively argues that, although the speech-crime of scolding was “not an exclusively female offense, it was exclusively a feminized one”, much like adultery. The evidence for this is persuasive: scolding and shrewishness were referred to in law books with feminine noun endings, made the subject of allegorical poems as female characters, and visually associated with female subjects in art.

The idea of women’s speech in particular as dangerous long predates early modern English law, and has a history which continues to this day. Anne Carson writes poignantly of the ancient roots of these conceits in “The Gender of Sound”:

…many female celebrities of classical mythology, literature and cult make themselves objectionable by the way they use their voice. For example there is the heartchilling groan of the Gorgon, whose name is derived from a Sanskrit word garg meaning “a guttural animal howl that

2 She estimates the figure of actual male scolds tried for the crime a little higher than Weiner does—perhaps as high as 20%, though likelier around 5% (6). However, her argument reinforces, rather than counteracts, the notion that scolding was a gendered crime. Regardless of the literal number of men tried for scolding, it was still thought and spoken of as a female, and feminine, transgression.
issues as a great wind from the back of the throat through a hugely distended mouth.” There are the Furies whose highpitched and horrendous voices are compared by Aiskhylos to howling dogs or sounds of people being tortured in hell. There is the deadly voice of the Sirens and the dangerous ventriloquism of Helen and the incredible babbling of Kassandra and the fearsome hullabaloo of Artemis as she charges through the woods. There is the seductive discourse of Aphrodite which is so concrete an aspect of her power that she can wear it on her belt as a physical object or lend it to other women. There is the old woman of Eleusinian legend Iambe who shrieks and throws her skirt up over her head to expose her genitalia. There is the haunting garrulity of the nymph Echo (daughter of Iambe in Athenian legend) who is described by Sophokles as “the girl with no door on her mouth.” Putting a door on the female mouth as been an important project of patriarchal culture from antiquity to present day. Its chief tactic is an ideological association of female sound with monstrosity, disorder and death. (120-121).

Each of Carson’s examples may help us to recognize the pervasiveness of the danger of female voices throughout literary and world history. Some of the most significant figures in the most foundational works of Western literature are, or are male heroes victimized by, women who talk too much. Nor does this problem end with Shakespeare’s era, and it would be a mistake to see the early modern obsession with silencing women as a relic of the past. Women are given measurably fewer opportunities to speak than men, particularly in professional contexts. A recent study, for instance, found that men are still invited to speak at academic conferences twice as often as women are—and that this figure doubles again when the selecting committee is all-male (Nittrouer et al). In the classic study “Gender and Language in the Workplace,” Shari Kendall and Deborah Tannen found that the shortest comment made by a man in a meeting was longer than the longest comment made by a woman, and that each of the men interrupted more than all of the women (Kendall and Tannen 84).

In spite of these realities, stereotypes about women’s speech persist. Both male and female listeners perceive a conversation that is exactly equitable between men and women as
being female-dominated (Culter and Scott 254). This measurable difference coexists with familiar cultural tropes about nagging wives and gossipy women. Indeed, every one of the studies cited above begins with a reference to the entrenched nature of this cultural belief.

Certainly, then, fear or disgust provoked by women’s speech is not a particularly early modern or English or early modern English phenomenon. Nonetheless, I will argue that the desire to “put a door on the female mouth” was extremely, and perhaps especially, important to this particular historical and cultural moment (Carson 121). As suggested by the discrepancy in the reported percentage of men accused of scolding, the historical record is not as clear as one might wish on the subject of verbal crimes in early modern England. Thus, it is difficult to historicize the exact extant of these transgressions and the penalties laid out for them in numeric terms. It can best be understood as part of a cultural phenomenon which prefigures our own.

Regardless of what charges were actually brought, against whom, or how often, laws against scolding were certainly passed, and condemned a surprisingly broad range of (usually specifically) female verbal behavior. In “Scolding Brides and Bridling Scolds”, Lynda E. Boose cites a 1675 law that defined “A Scold in a legal sense [is] a troublesome and angry woman, who by her brawling and wrangling amongst her Neighbours, doth break the publick Peace, and beget, cherish and increase Discord” (186). The punishment was ducking in a public pond, a punishment that was intended to recompense the damage the offender had committed against public order “with a notable kind of pain” (186). The public nature of both crime and punishment, and the law’s focus on the offender’s gender, stresses the importance of the shrew as a figure of early modern cultural anxieties about the extent to which women can be controlled. This is analogous to how adultery was treated in the period—it was illegal for both men and
women, and served as a public legislation of what we might now think of as private and individual behavior, but women were disproportionately charged with the offense and it was seen as a feminized crime.

It is also possible to trace the reception of the scold or shrew through her appearances onstage and in literature. Shakespeare’s shrews have a number of literary antecedents and descendants in their own era. The Royal Shakespeare Company names the anonymous 1594 play *The Taming of a Shrew*, folkloric sources, Christian sermons on the respective duties of husbands and wives, and earlier literary texts from mystery plays to “The Wife of Bath’s Tale” as influences, as well as more obscure literary texts (the 1550 tale in verse by an anonymous author, *Here Begynneth a Merry Jest of a Shrewde and Curste Wyfe, Lapped in Morrelles Skin, for Her Good Behavyour*, and John Heywood’s *Merry Play*), among the influences on *Taming of the Shrew*, for example. The shrew-taming narrative was an entire subgenre of Elizabethan comedy, particularly popular on the stage. How this stock character is interpreted by the era’s most famous writer may help us understand both how early modern English culture dealt with the destabilizing power of women’s sexuality and speech, and how its legacy may be interpreted today.

Although the shrew is a titular figure in only one of Shakespeare’s plays, an analogous character appears in many of the plays. Each of the three plays central to this thesis features such a figure: a female character who primarily plays a role of critic[^1], who can be said to be a

[^1]: There are also many other characters in the canon that fall into such a role. Katerina, the titular shrew, is one. Another notable example is Margaret, in the first history quartet and particularly in *Richard III*. Because of this thesis’ narratological focus, I will not digress into extensive examinations of these characters’ depiction of shrewishness as their plots follow different courses than those considered here, but they would make useful objects for further study.
“troublesome and angry woman,” as the legal definition explored above would put it, not just by readers of the play but by the text of the play itself. Each play has its own complex and multifaceted relationship with “scolding,” which I will endeavor to explore in more detail as I consider the three case studies in all their particularities. However, although the characters are undoubtedly each their own, there are also important parallels in how they are presented, as characters and as scolding figures. Because they are presented in such similar ways, and because they have the same function in the plot, they can each be said to serve the same narratological function. They are each, I will show: defined as scolds from their first introduction in the play, associated heavily with another female character, who is wrongfully accused of adultery, the sole or major force to speak in defense of this other woman, and a critical determining factor in the outcome of the play’s plot.

That is, in a narratological sense, these characters play the same role. My method for considering these characters as narrative units relies on the scheme first introduced by Vladimir Propp in *Morphology of the Folktale*, which considers the characters of the folktale in terms of their “functions” within the plot (52). Propp identifies 31 character-types, of which the character-type I am trying to identify here—the female helper/scold/shrew/defender—is some complex combination (Propp, of course, is dealing with folk tales, which generally can be understood to have less complex characterization than a constructed work of fiction like a play). Propp understands this scheme to be “a measuring stick for tales,” a way of solving “the problem of kinship of tales, the problem of themes and variants” (92). Although his morphological understanding of character has been influential in folklore and fairytale studies, and has been applied in the study of other kinds of narrative fiction, it has not, to my knowledge, ever been
applied to the study of drama—and, although Propp expresses a primary interest in facilitating the comparison of texts, his scheme is more often used in a general understanding of myths within or even across the figures as he defines them than in direct comparisons of how particular characters function within specific literary texts.

Yet Propp’s theory of the character as a device which moves within the plot in certain set ways is of obvious utility in looking at a group of characters with such similar apparent functions in the plot, and such different outcomes. Propp’s is only one of many “attempts to describe characters in terms of a deep structure based on their roles in the plot common to all narratives”—without going so far into structuralist understandings of characterization, this can still be a useful tool for understanding characters’ roles in the plot common to these three particular narratives (Propp 94). I am particularly interested here in using this as a tool, as Propp suggested would be possible, for exploring the question of theme across these three narratives—namely, the theme of women’s speech and the extent to which it is believed or disbelieved.
One: The Construction of the Scold

Our first hint that these characters can be seen as a single narratological unit for comparison comes with their initial appearance onstage. The similarity in how they are introduced suggests the commonality between their roles in the story, and the cultural tropes their characterization calls upon, that makes a comparison between them so fruitful. Although there are differences in their initial appearance, which I will explore in detail, each character is introduced as a shrewish or scolding figure, with language that critiques her excessive speech in heavily gendered terms.

In *Othello*, Emilia does not actually appear onstage until the first scene of Act Two. Nor does Emilia get a chance to establish who she is as a character through either her speech or her behavior. Instead, she is defined by her husband. The very first thing we hear about Emilia comes
from Iago: he says, to Desdemona, that “she puts her tongue a little in her heart/And chides with thinking” (*Othello* 2.1.119). Thus, from her initial appearance onward, Emilia has been placed in the stereotyped role of the scolding wife, chiding her husband as easily as she thinks. As an audience, we know nothing but this about her, and it is some time before we are able to witness Emilia’s interiority.

In *Much Ado About Nothing*, Beatrice has already been onstage and performed her wit for the audience, but her first real scene with Benedick has even more, and still more apparently vitriolic, discourse about her speech. Once again, these attacks are from a male romantic interest, though in this case a future, rather than a present, husband. This similarity may speak, once again, to the entanglement of sexuality, speech, and marriage as sites of patriarchal anxiety about uncontrolled and uncontrollable female behavior.

The specifics of Benedick’s discourse about Beatrice’s speech reveals some of the particular misogynistic implications and connotations that have already announced themselves in *Othello’s* introduction of Emilia, in the historical and legal record, and in other works of cultural and literary production from the period through today. Each word of his speech introduces a new particular to how Beatrice, and her speech, are characterized for the audience, with a remarkable density of epithets that will be repeated later in *The Winter’s Tale* as Leontes address Paulina. And, as is typical for the character, he goes on at some length, mirroring the irony that the linguistics research cited in the introduction demonstrates still thrives today: this male character, in criticizing a woman’s speech, certainly talks a lot himself.

Beatrice is “my dear Lady Disdain,” converting “courtesy to disdain” in his address to her just as Beatrice will offer to do in her retort (1.1.116). Next, he calls her “a rare parrot-
teacher,” with the implications of squawking, meaningless noise that call to mind the very stereotypes about women’s speech that underline early modern English anti-scold laws (1.1.135). It might also suggest the very common modern accusation of “hen-pecking,” although this term may not yet have been in use at the time⁴. This animal reference obviously dehumanizes her, at least in his estimation, and suggests the hefty weight of scolding as an accusation for early modern women—a scold is literally less than human.

Benedick concludes his speech with the sarcastic wish that “my horse had the speed of your tongue and so good a continuer, but keep your way, i’ God’s name, I have done” (1.1.139-141). Another comparison to an animal, as well as the explicit bodily reference to her tongue—a common part of discourse around scolding—and Benedick has established a cloud of these misogynistic connotations to settle upon Beatrice in the very first scene of the play. In their first interaction, he has leveled almost all of the early modern tropes about scolding women against Beatrice⁵.

Even more clear than Beatrice’s figuration as a scold is Paulina’s, in The Winter’s Tale. She actually introduces herself as a scolding figure. Her reclamation of the very language used to

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⁴ The OED dates the first usage of hen-pecked, as a conjoined expression, to 1680, which obviously would post-date all of Shakespeare’s plays. Though there may not be earlier recorded usages, the repeated use of bird, and especially chicken/hen/rooster imagery, in both this play and even more so later in The Winter’s Tale, suggests that the logic underlying this misogynist metaphor, if not the phrase itself, was already present at the time that Shakespeare authored the play.

⁵ Though not, notably, the suggestion of sexual immorality. Indeed, Beatrice seems to be free of the conflation between free speech and free sexuality. There are no serious questions about her chastity in the play, and later Benedick explicitly claims that there is no doubt that she is a virgin, even when he is supposedly searching for reasons not to fall in love with her: she is “virtuous; ’tis so, I cannot reprove it” (2.3.234). If anything, her apparent disinterest in men and sex is a source of worry for figures of male authority, like her uncle.
condemn her in the play, and women like her throughout early modern England, is striking. Hearing of Hermione’s imprisonment, she immediately declares her intention to make her speech a profound and explicitly feminized site of resistance: “‘These dangerous unsafe lunes i’ th’ King, beshrew them!/He must be told on ’t, and he shall. The office/Becomes a woman best. I’ll take ’t upon me./If I prove honey-mouthed, let my tongue blister/ And never to my red-looked anger be/ The trumpet anymore” (2.2.39-44).

Paulina uses inventive and specific language here in order to construct herself as a scolding figure, while simultaneously reclaiming and transforming the label. The word “beshrew” is, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, indeed etymologically derived from the same definition of “shrew” that gives us the meaning “a person, esp. (now only) a woman given to railing or scolding or other perverse or malignant behaviour; frequently a scolding or turbulent wife” (OED 3.A). In a sense, by choosing this word, she is declaring that the king deserves to “be shrewed”—to be the target of scolding, particularly from a woman. This is an interesting reclamation of a term so often culturally and legally weaponized against women. Even Beatrice, who is for the most part extraordinarily assertive in how she reacts to the accusation of shrewishness, does not suggest that shrewishness could be a positive trait. Paulina, unique among the three characters under consideration here—and likely uncharacteristically for an early modern woman, given the ways in which shrewish behavior was unequivocally condemned, recognizes “shrewing” as a strength, indeed, as a gift that she has to offer, as a power that women possess. It is also, not just positive, but necessary: the king “must” be told of the unacceptability of his behavior (2.2.40).
Nor is “beshrew” the only gendered term she deploys against Leontes in this initial speech, for here she also condemns his behavior as “dangerous unsafe *lunes*” (emphasis mine). The obscure term “lunes” is defined as “fits of frenzy or lunacy; mad freaks or tantrums” (OED n.2). This definition, tautologically, seems to largely stem from the way in which “lunes” is used in its context in *Winter’s Tale*, however. Despite the difficulties with this word, there are a few connotations evident from its apparent etymology which, even if less than strictly accurate, may be relevant because they are suggested by the similarity in sound. Though unclear in its origin, the word “lunes” is evidently, from the context in the line as well as how it was used by later authors, tied to such gendered terms as *lunacy* and *lunatic*. Yet here, this feminized term for madness is applied, not to the female scold herself, but to the ultimate figure of masculine power — the king. Furthermore, the king is not having or expressing these “lunes,” they are *in* him, a

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6 The word *lunes*, again making reference to the OED, seems to be a Shakespearian innovation as there was no previous usage, though it was picked up by a few authors subsequently, mostly in the 18th century. The fact that Shakespeare may well have invented this word does name its connotations more difficult to untangle, as they cannot be inferred from other contemporaneous sources. However, it is also an indication of the significance of such shades of meaning as can be discovered. Shakespeare’s decision to create his own term here, if indeed he did, suggests that other words might be insufficient for his purposes, and therefore places particular importance on this word choice.

7 The OED also defines it as a derivative of the same root, but because they seem to be using *Winter’s Tale* as the primary source for their definition, it is hard to judge the accuracy of this etymology.

8 Others have written extensively on the gendered nature of such terms, both historically and in modern discourse. See, for instance, the work of Ingram and Faubert, which argues that “what characterized women also characterized madmen” of both sexes, an argument with obvious resonance for how Paulina’s accusation of insanity against Leontes might land (136). The word originally referred to “intermittent insanity such as was formerly supposed to be brought about by the changes of the moon,” and thus has an obvious connection to the notion of “hysteria” and other kinds of insanity supposedly caused by women’s menstrual cycles and their relation to the cycles of the moon (OED).
figuration that suggests the kind of bodily focus characteristic of how scolding women are
imagined in early modern English legal and cultural records. Paulina’s terminology allows the
audience to imagine that, just as women’s lunacy originates in their wombs, Leontes’ madness
centers in his body.

Thus, Paulina’s initial speech introduces the concept of scolding, allowing this
construction to center on her character from her very first appearance—just as it does for Emilia
and Beatrice. What is distinct about this introduction is that, for Paulina alone, scolding is not
something that is put upon her by an external, male force. It is a label that she claims for herself,
and one, against all social understandings of the term, that she constructs as a form of
empowerment. Yes, women are scolds, Paulina tells us, and that is not just inevitable but
necessary and positive, a form of female power on which the correcting of social wrongs depend.
This is an obviously radical statement in a cultural milieu for which scolding was so roundly
condemned.

It is important to note that Paulina is not trying to detach scolding from its gendered
context here. She does not construct it as a form of speech beyond or outside gendered
paradigms. Instead, she claims outright that “the office becomes a woman best” (2.2.41). The
tendency to scold, or perhaps, as Paulina is reimagining it, the talent for scolding, is feminized
by Paulina, just as the sin and crime of scolding are feminized in the cultural and legal
definitions of the term in the broader early modern English imagination. The negative
connotations of weakness, madness, uncertainty, and illness usually associated with the female
cluster around the male body, the king’s, in the form of his “lunes,” and it is shrewishness as
power, clarity, and necessity that Paulina boldly claims as her own.
We can therefore establish that each of these three characters is initially established as a scold. The apparent similarities in these characters—both in terms of characterization in the modern sense, of the personality of these characters as a certain “type” of realistic “person”, and in terms of their function in the plot in a narratological sense—are evident. However, though each is criticized for excessive speech, the tone and tenor of these speeches, and their reactions to them, are distinct. Attention to these differences will become critical in establishing how each character functions within her narrative.

Emilia has the least unusual response to being termed a scold, in terms of what we might expect from an early modern woman. When Iago accuses her of chiding, she responds, simply, “You have little cause to say so” (2.1.119). The brevity and mildness of this response provides an initial support for its own veracity—she carefully avoids chiding him, and speaks so few words that even Iago cannot continue to accuse her of being a scold. After her reply, he does shift the focus of his misogynistic speech in this scene, from a critique of her particular behavior to a general satire of women’s faults. It seems her careful words have successfully turned him away from an attack on her. Yet, strategic though they may be, her words may also be seen to convey some of the hurt she feels at such a public critique, one that is more fully explored in Emilia’s later appearances in the play.

Interestingly, given the later narratological alignment of the two characters, the only countering perspective we are given to Iago’s assertions about Emilia’s shrewishness comes from Desdemona. She responds strongly to Iago’s mockery: “Alas, she has no speech!” she exclaims—a statement which is literally true, as Emilia has yet to speak even a single word in the play at
that point (2.1.115). Iago continues, ignoring Desdemona, accusing Emilia of scolding so much and so often that he is unable to get enough sleep.

Desdemona’s interference is not an efficacious one, but it is critical—given the importance of Emilia’s later defense of her character against an equally gendered and dangerous accusation, and the overall absence of female voices from the play. Desdemona’s response here prefigures how Emilia’s own defense of Desdemona will be received, at first mocked and then simply ignored. It is Iago who gets the literal and figurative “last word” in his wife’s introduction, and both Desdemona and Emilia speak very little, in spite of Iago’s mockery of talkative women. There are, of course, only three women in the play, who have a combined 283 lines of the play’s 3560 total—less than ten percent. This aligns with what contemporary studies of gender and speech have found. Women are perceived as talking too much even when they speak very little.

This creates a double bind for Emilia. In her response, as in the initial configuration of the label of scolding, Emilia takes on what a contemporaneous audience might have expected of her. For Emilia, the idea that she is a scold is an outside attack on her, made by her husband as a figure of patriarchal power. She attempts to defend herself against it, while still complying with early modern expectations about how women could speak. As a result, Emilia’s characterization as a scold is the shortest, the least complex—and the most tragic. Both Beatrice and Paulina have much longer scenes, and, ironically, much more speech. Emilia, on the other hand, remains silent in response to the accusation that she talks too much, introducing the tragic irony of gendered

9 Formally, this can best be seen in the fact that both Desdemona and Emilia speak only in split lines here, shared with Iago. Neither has even a single entire line of verse in which to express herself.
relations that will continue throughout the play. It is her silence, and not her condemned and
criticized speech, that is, as Eamon Grennan notes in “The Women’s Voices in Othello,” “direct
catalysts for the play’s tragic action” (284). With her voice, and the power it holds, set aside,
Emilia becomes an actor in the play’s tragedy, her desperate attempts to win the approval of her
virulently misogynistic husband culminating in her theft of the handkerchief and the precipitating
action of the play’s deadly conclusion.

Where Emilia is treated in a way that aligns with early modern beliefs about women’s
speech, Beatrice’s introduction begins to counter and critique those ideas, a dynamic which
continues throughout Much Ado. Benedick criticizes Beatrice, just as Iago criticizes Emilia, in
terms of her speech and gender. These epithets, however, are evidently lighter in tone than those
found in other plays or in the legal and cultural discourse of the era. Nor does Benedick speak to
a yielding, mostly silent woman, as Iago does when he addresses his wife. Beatrice, as is typical
of her character throughout the play, gives as good as she gets. Furthermore, his critiques of her
also subtly reveal some measure of hidden admiration, which will become more explicit over the
course of the play as their relationship unfolds. For instance, although he calls her “Disdain,” as
though this word were literally her name, or perhaps imagining her as the sort of metaphorical
personification of a character trait so common in early modern literary discourses, she is also his
“dear lady,” a gesture of politeness and intimacy that suggests, even in this early moment in the
play, that there is more to their relationship than the contempt revealed by the kind of direct
attack Iago makes on Emilia’s perceived shrewishness (1.1.116).

Benedick’s descriptions of Beatrice, though inarguably insulting in nature, also set her
apart. Rather than constituting a generally misogynist discourse about women’s natures, as Iago’s
speech soon does, Benedick’s focuses on her individuality. She is “his” dear lady Disdain, not some general figure that he critiques from a distance (1.1.116). Furthermore, as a “rare” parrot teacher, Beatrice stands apart from other women (1.1.136). Although this is certainly a word choice indicative of early modern misogynies, as explored above, it is also a statement of Beatrice’s individuality, perhaps even her value\(^\text{10}\). This possibility is, of course, strengthened by the fact that, given the ending of the play, it is evident to any reader already familiar with the text that all of Benedick’s criticisms of Beatrice are also inflected with his deep admiration and love for her.

One example of how this is implied is in Benedick’s comparison of Beatrice’s tongue to his horse. Although his language here is characteristic of the discourses of shrewishness in early modern England, focusing on the tongue as a woman’s weapon and even comparing Beatrice to an animal, it is also an *admiring* comparison. To refigure his language slightly, Beatrice is swifter than a horse in her speech—a statement that begins to make her seem powerful rather than despised. Benedick’s relationship to the possibility of women’s power is, here and throughout the play, not the reactive, deeply anxious affect that is typical of toxic masculinities. Instead, he remains, throughout the play, comfortably in the displaced position towards these deep fears that McEachern suggests that comedy can create. That is, Benedick treats Beatrice’s powerful speech

\(^{10}\) More broadly, *Much Ado About Nothing* decidedly imagines Beatrice as unique in her ability to generate speech, as her characteristic “wit”. This is evident through Benedick’s discussions of her, from her own self-image, and in how other characters in the play respond to her. Furthermore, this difference in the value placed on Beatrice’s speech is a key aspect of how the character, and the play, have been received by audiences throughout its performance and scholarly history.
with mockery, yes, but also with respect, as compared to the silencing and shaming way that Iago reacts to Emilia.

Worthy of consideration, too, is how Benedick’s introduction of Beatrice is framed within the play. This scene is not a one-sided assault on her character, as Iago’s satirization of Emilia is. Rather, it is the famous “battle of wits” that so defines this play. And Beatrice does not just give as good as she gets: she gives rather better. Benedick’s final statement here is a concession: “keep your ways, i’God’s name, I have done”—after which he exits, allowing Beatrice to have the last word (1.1.141). She does not respond to his final statement that she is shrewish, but instead to his cowardice in leaving the argument half-had, just when he seems to be losing. A particularly poignant staging of this moment can be seen in the 2019 Shakespeare in the Park production. Danielle Brooks, as Beatrice, takes up vastly more space in the scene than does Benedick, and, instead of dropping the line “you always end with a jade’s trick/I know you of old” into a muttered reminiscence of their romantic past—as I have often seen other actors do—she seizes the moment, and center stage, all but shouting the insult after the departing Benedick (1.1.142). This staging makes particularly visible what is inherent in the scene itself. Already, the other characters, and the play itself, have suggested a very different attitude towards Beatrice’s scolding than towards Emilia’s.

Lastly, it is worth considering how this scene is framed within the play. Certainly, Much Ado About Nothing gives Benedick a substantial amount of space to voice his critiques of Beatrice, many of which center around her excessive speech and resemble the misogynistic anti-scold discourse of early modern England. However, Benedick is only able to do this after Beatrice has already introduced him, in the very first scene of the play. He is offstage, still on his
way to Messina, when Beatrice gets the chance to introduce him. He is “Signior Mountanto,” an obscure but undoubtedly insulting term, before we ever even hear his name (1.1.30).

Shortly thereafter, we hear her accuse him of cowardice (“I promised to eat all of his killing,” implying he is so poor a fighter that she could literally cannibalize the bodies of his dead because there will be none), gluttony (“a very valiant trencherman”), effeminacy (“a good soldier to a lady, but what is he to a lord?”) and hypocrisy (“no less than a stuffed man”) in rapid succession (1.1.42, 50, 54, 56). Some of these insults are gendered in nature, just as Benedick’s characterizations of Beatrice are. Therefore, the language of scolding with which Benedick describes Beatrice rings very differently in Much Ado than it does in Othello. It becomes, not a performance of masculine power over women, but a part of the inherently equitable “battle of the sexes” that forms the heart of this play. Benedick mocks Beatrice’s femininity, in the form of scolding, just as she mocks his masculinity, in terms of cowardice and effeminacy, making both critiques necessarily less charged.

This difference is apparent in contemporary stagings of the production as well. Among directors, Much Ado is often considered to be one of the easiest of Shakespeare’s plays to stage, especially of the comedies. Many of the comedies contain attitudes, especially about gender, that are offensive, and not comedic, to a contemporary audience. In a play like Taming of the Shrew, for example, this misogyny is embedded in the play’s very structure. In Much Ado, individual lines may make reference to sexist tropes, but the overall logic of the play is one of equality, and the tone of the conflicts between Beatrice and Benedick is infused with pleasure—for both performers and the audience. In 2017, I directed the play (with an all-female cast, and two queer women in the lead), and found scenes like this one to read before a contemporary audience with
ease even without gender differentiation in the cast. This is not to say that gender is not an
important consideration in the play, merely that the gender relations in the play remain legible
even outside of a hierarchical and binary construction of gender.

The same is not necessarily true of The Winter’s Tale. In spite of the boldness with which
she claims the label, Paulina is not free from the same discourses around women’s speech that
attach to the other two characters. Indeed, when she does eventually confront Leontes, as she
promised, a few scenes later, she is greeted with some of the most explicitly misogynistic
language in the canon. Her earlier claims to shrewishness as female power seem at first to
disintegrate under a wave of insults that recreate the tropes of shrewishness in the broader early
modern culture. With a focus on the body, particularly on female speech as tied to illicit female
sexuality, with particular attention to how shrewishness emasculates its male targets (especially
husbands, establishing an association with cuckoldry), and with the reappearance of animal
metaphors, Paulina’s claims to speech as power are transmuted into grounds for mockery, verbal
violence, and the threat of torture or death.

As soon as Paulina is actually trying to practice this feminized form of power, she is
explicitly attacked and attempts are made to exclude her entirely from the discourse. Her initial
speech to Leontes receives the reply: “A mankind witch! Hence with her, out o’ door./A most
intelligencing bawd” (Winter’s Tale 2.3.84-85). The gendered nature of this language hardly
needs explication. However, two of the implications are particularly significant. The first word I
want to draw attention to is “witch”. Witchcraft, like adultery and shrewishness, was an early
modern preoccupation, and was similarly gendered as the provenance of unruly and disobedient
women. Similarly, it seems to have generated fear precisely because it represented a form of
female power that could not be successfully and entirely dismantled by patriarchal systems of
domination and control. Secondly, the word “bawd” is significant. Leontes is here accusing
Paulina as serving as a pander for his adulterous wife—an accusation that Othello also levels
against Emilia. In the male reception of female speech, no woman can advocate against an
accusation without herself becoming complicit in a sexual crime. We might begin to see a
significant connection to contemporary issues here: when an accusation of sexual misconduct is
made against a (usually male) aggressor, it is often the (female) victim whose dress, conduct, and
behavior is put on trial.

Finally, I want to parse the difficult usage of the word “mankind” here. There are two
different obsolete meanings of “mankind” that are worth noting. One is “of a woman: masculine”
(OED 1.2). This usage, though unfamiliar to the contemporary reader, was in fairly common
usage in Shakespeare’s time. Shakespeare seems to have used it in this sense on at least one other
occasion, as did other major early modern playwrights. The OED notes that it can be difficult to
parse whether “mankind” is meant in this sense, or in another, equally obsolete, way: “infuriated,
furious, fierce, mad”¹¹ (OED 2). Earlier, Paulina spoke about Leontes’ “lunes”—now he is the
one accusing her of madness. The idea that, as a “shrew”, she is an unnatural, masculine woman

¹¹ These usages, though convergent in meaning, have different etymological derivations. In the
sense of “man-like,” “mankind” is a compound of “man” and “-kind”, meaning type, and stems
from the same root as the more common usage of mankind today (in the sense of humanity as a
group). The second usage, “mankind” meaning angry, has a different root altogether, as a
corruption of the medieval “man-keen,” used initially to describe an animal with a tendency to
attack human beings—that is, a beast who was keen on man. I note this because it suggests the
same kind of animalistic dehumanization of masculine women as essentially beasts. Though the
two terms are not fundamentally related, their convergent evolution suggests just how strong the
notion of masculine women as animals is. This same comparison will reappear several times in
the rest of Leontes’ speech.
is a common one, and overturns the assertion Paulina made earlier. The “office” she has taken on herself here, of rebuking the king, does not, Leontes argues, “become a woman best”—instead, it performs the exact opposite function, making this woman become, in some sense, a man (2.2.41).

Leontes’ next set of insults are not leveled directly at Paulina, but instead at her husband, Antigonus. They are thus even more revelatory about the nature of the play’s initial discourse regarding women’s speech. As the historical record cited above shows, shrewishness was associated with adultery because both were emasculating to men, and especially to those perceived unfortunates married to such a masculine, unfeminine woman. This is the exact discourse leveled at Antigonus in Leontes’ speech: “Thou dotard; thou art woman-tired, unroosted/ By thy Dame Partlet here.” (Winter’s Tale 2.3.94-95). The gendered references in this line come so quickly that they are difficult to separate out, particularly because some of them contain rather obscure references. It is worth both teasing them out for an individual examination, in order to more fully understand the specifics of how Leontes imagines Paulina’s shrewishness, and to consider it as a whole, as a speech which is deliberately overwhelming in the weight and number of critiques of her speech and of her relationship with her husband.

First, Leontes calls Antigonus a “dotard”. The implications about Antigonus’ masculinity, and the ways in which Paulina’s scolding has undermined it, are twofold in this epithet. A dotard, according to the OED, is first and foremost “an imbecile; a silly or stupid person; (now usually) a person whose intellect is impaired by age; a person in his or her dotage or second childhood.” As Anthony Ellis explores in Old Age, Masculinity, and Early Modern Drama: Comic Elders on the Italian and Shakespearean Stage, age, like so much else, could dismantle masculinity under the
rigid conceptions of gender in early modern Europe. Humoral theory held that men grew colder as they aged, losing the vital heat that separated them from women. Ellis cites an early modern medical handbook that suggested “Sex should simply be avoided by old men” because their aging, cooling bodies could not spare the heat, nor the energy, necessary for ejaculation (1). As men aged, they became both desexualized and emasculated, entering, as the definition suggests, a second childhood\textsuperscript{12}. If Antigonus has prematurely entered his dotage as a result of Paulina’s scolding, he is no longer entirely a man. This metaphor again emphasizes the fragility of early modern masculinity. Not only can it be destabilized by women’s power, it is also inevitably lost with age.

But a dotard is also “a person who dotes (on something); a doter” (OED 1.b). That is, it is an affective as well as a generational state. And in the early modern English conception of gender, to dote—that is, to be excessively consumed with love for something—is the ultimately emasculating emotion. Indeed, in early modern English, the word “effeminate” was sometimes used to refer to a man who was “excessively devoted to women” (OED 3). Examples of this usage are even found within the Shakespearian canon, as when Romeo declares, “O sweet Juliet, Thy beauty hath made me effeminate” (3.1.118-119). Romeo’s devotion to, his dotage upon, Juliet, has feminized him, made him womanlike, in his excessive attachment to her female person and her femininity (described here as her “beauty”). This seems peculiar to a 21st century reader, given that in current usage effeminacy in men is perceived as suggestive of homosexuality. However, for the early modern reader, it is an excess of heterosexual desire that

\textsuperscript{12} The significance of the “second childhood” model of old age to early modern English people, and even to Shakespeare in particular, may be inferred from its literary legacy, as in the famous “Seven Ages of Man” speech, which repeats this exact metaphor.
renders men feminine. Thus, as Antigonus dotes on Paulina, he effectively renders himself feminine, or at least unmasculine, in Leontes’ conception of gender. Just as Paulina is “mankind,” Antigonus is “doting”—Paulina’s scolding is not just representative of her own incomplete performance of femininity. It threatens to destabilize the entire gendered order of male and female relations.

Though this dichotomy in which both husband and wife seem to fail to perform gender correctly superficially resembles Beatrice and Benedick’s dynamic, there are significant differences. Most significant is the source of these critiques. Rather than coming from within the relationship—and equitably in both directions—Leontes leverages them from outside and above. This is not a back-and-forth, but a two-pronged attack on the dynamic of feminized man and masculinized woman. Secondly, the tone is also important. There is nothing admiring, fond, or respectful here, as there is in Beatrice and Benedick’s rapport. This is only criticism.

The strength of Leontes’ rejection of Paulina’s scolding is intensified by the repetition of ideas and criticisms. These dual meanings of “dotard”—of old age and excess devotion—are again referenced in the next appellation, “woman-tired” (2.3.94). This is difficult to parse in part because of its obscurity. The OED offers “dominated by a woman or wife; henpecked” as a definition, but gives no reference other than to this line in Winter’s Tale, nor could I find any in other sources. However, the meaning, whether we are to take the OED as authoritative or to infer from context itself, intensifies the earlier sense of Antigonus as weakened, literally tired and aged, as a result of a “woman,” his wife Paulina. Perhaps Antigonus is even “woman-tired” in the sense that he is tired like a woman would be, as a result of supposedly inferior physical strength. It seems noteworthy that this expression, apparently coined by Shakespeare for usage in
this play, suggests both the lack of strength and the excessive attachment referenced by the previous usage of “dotard”.

Leontes also calls Antigonus “unroosted,” yet another unfamiliar word. This seems, from the context within the play, to mean the act of literally or metaphorically removing someone from their “roost”, or home. Here, Shakespeare is not inventing a word wholesale—there are a few usages of “unroost” or “unroosted” slightly earlier in the history of the English language, but he is certainly choosing a highly unusual term, and thus we should perhaps pay particular interest to it. This word suggests animal imagery, much as Benedick’s insults to Beatrice do, given that it is birds, and not people, that roost. The repetition of this animal imagery suggests that someone unable to perform their proper hierarchical place in gender relations is perhaps then less than human.

Furthermore, the imagery here seems to be particular to birds. For the modern reader, there is the evident similarity of “roost” to “rooster,” although the latter word seems not to have come into usage yet (to an early modern English speaker, a male chicken would be, exclusively, a cock). Yet even without this evident pun, a roost is still particularly the perch of a bird, and indeed both of the earlier usages of “unroost” I could find reference to, as well as many of those that followed Shakespeare, referred literally or metaphorically to a particular bird. Bird imagery is particularly interesting in this context: although again not yet recorded as being in common use at the time the play was written, we now have adopted “hen-pecked” as an extremely common expression analogous to the accusation Leontes is making about Antigonus’
masculinity\textsuperscript{13}. Thus, comparisons of the scolding wife to a bird ring especially true for modern readers. Furthermore, references to birds and masculinity may be weighted with the origins of the most devastating early modern slur against manhood: cuckoldry, a word deriving from “cuckoo” (the bird that was supposed to push its own young out of its nest and raise that of others). This is, perhaps, the sense in which Leontes believes that Paulina has “unroosted” Antigonus, by pushing him out of the nest or roost of their home in favor of some illicit lover. Thus, Leontes’ language deepens the play’s association between a woman who emasculates her husband through her speech and a woman who emasculates him through her adultery.

The last part of Leontes’ line is also perhaps the most confusing, at least for a modern reader: the reference to “Dame Partlett.” It is a multi-faceted reference, like the others. A “Partlett” was an item of women’s clothing, a garment worn over the cleavage to fill in a gown’s low neckline. But in fable, “Dame Partlett” is a hen, most famously presented as the wife of Chanticleer in Chaucer’s \textit{The Nun’s Priest’s Tale}. I will point out here that this is yet another reference to birds, and the second to chickens, in this line. “Dame Partlett,” in Chaucer’s tale, is certainly a scolding figure, and not just because of the association between the pecking of a chicken and the nagging of a wife: she speaks more than any other character in the fable, and all in instructions to her husband. Moreover, she appears in a tale with the stated moralistic message: “heaven send him bad luck who will keep jangling when he should be silent” (Chaucer

\textsuperscript{13}Although I suspect that the use of the word “hen-pecked” may actually substantially predate its first entry in the OED, or at least that it is reminiscent of earlier terms with similar metaphorical connotations. The imagery of birds in relation to shrewish women is simply too prevalent in these plays for me to think otherwise. Furthermore, when the term does emerge in print it does so quite suddenly, perhaps because it was already in wide use in speech. If I am correct, then the word “unroosted” here has yet another connotation of animalism and misogyny.
Whether or not this is a fair reading of the story itself, it is nevertheless one of the meanings encoded in the appellation of Paulina as a “Dame Partlett,” and therefore another example of how the character, from her first introduction, is associated with excessive speech. The character of Dame Partlett comes from a story where all ill luck stems from the source of excessive or illicit speech. Thus, this reference, though perhaps not immediately apparent, forms yet another condemnation of the scolding woman.

Leontes goes on to continue this pattern of misogynistic language in the rest of the speech. There are numerous references to Paulina’s “tongue,” thrice in the next thirty lines or so. The image of the woman’s “boundless tongue,” unable to be stopped or controlled by the husband, is the bodily metaphor at the center of early modern English discourse around scolding (2.3.116). Leontes throws out insults referencing every anti-woman trope of early modern culture, many of which we still have to this day. Paulina is a “callet,” a “hag,” and he will have her sent to the fire to be burnt as a witch (2.3.146). There is a trifecta of anxieties at play here: of female power through magic, of female power through speech, and of female power through sexuality.

Paulina, the scolding and thus powerful woman, must be silenced. Emilia, with her potential to destabilize Iago’s male verbal power, already has been. It is only the comedic Beatrice who has the power to speak. All three women are spoken of as scolds, all three teased and criticized. Yet Beatrice—who plays a different structural role as well, as the romantic heroine

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14 There is an obvious connection here between the parts of the female body that are dangerous when out of control: the “boundless tongue” of the scold and the unregulated vagina of the adulteress. As these close readings have demonstrated, the fear of adultery is never far behind when the fear of scolding is verbalized.
of the play rather than a secondary character—is permitted to give much greater voice to her own criticisms of masculine power and authority. It is this ability, I will argue, that allows the play to retain its comedic ending.

All three plays are heavily steeped in the misogynistic rhetoric of the era. They all display anxiety around the female voice, and the truths it may be able to give voice to. In this anxiety are the shadows of other fears—the omnipresent possibility of cuckoldry, the danger of women completely overthrowing their subservient place, the impossibility of truly knowing any other person. It is within this dynamic, and against this background, that these three female characters are constructed.

It is also against this dynamic that they speak, for all three also pose a profound and explicit challenge to male power in their speech throughout the course of their stories. Just as patriarchal anxieties fear, their speech threatens to destabilize the hierarchical order of the play-world. This order, left unchecked, is one that falls inevitably to the tragic, and it is these voices, speaking against the pressure to be silent, that can restore a positive ending.
Two: The Scold and the Narrative

Thus far, I have established certain similarities in how each of the characters is established as a scold, and looked at key differences in how each reacts to this label. I have also considered the overall milieu of condemnation of women’s speech as a source of female power, and thus of masculine anxiety, and furthermore how these characters are each embedded in these affects. Now, I want to look seriously at the narrative aspects of each text, and consider the major intervention of each “scold” in the central plot. Here, I will argue that the narrative function of these characters is functionally identical—that, as women who are already condemned for excessive speech, they use their voices to attempt to intervene when another woman’s voice is not being heard.

Again, though, their roles should not be too closely conflated. Though each renders aid to the play’s wrongfully accused heroine, they do so in decidedly different manners, ultimately reflecting their individual characterizations in response to the misogyny that attaches to women
that are too vocal—and displaying a range of potential responses to those women from the broader world of the play. It is in this last aspect, in how their speech, once made, is treated, that the characters are most different.

Emilia’s support of Desdemona is, initially, the most limited of the three. True to her denial of the accusation of shrewishness, she says little throughout the early scenes of the play. Particularly when men are present onstage, she is mostly silent. In the first two acts of the play, she speaks less than ten lines in total. Furthermore, unlike the other two characters I will consider, she is initially complicit in the framing of Desdemona for adultery—it is, after all, Emilia who brings Iago the fatal handkerchief. Therefore, in the sense of Propp’s morphology of characters, she acts as a “helper” figure for Iago, the antagonist, as well as for Desdemona, the heroine.

However, once Emilia begins to speak—shortly after she has taken the handkerchief—she is immediately allied to Desdemona, just as she is losing the crucial support of other figures in the play, most notably Othello’s. Emilia begins introducing doubt to Desdemona about her security and safety in her marriage, providing a critical warning which, though unheeded, is nonetheless the closest the play provides to a defense for Desdemona against Othello’s verbal and eventually physical assaults on his wife. “Is he not jealous?” Emilia asks about Othello, and then later in the same scene, “is not this man jealous?” (3.4.30, 3.4.115). As soon as Emilia becomes an active part of the plot, she is supporting Desdemona, pressing her towards a realization of the danger that she is in.

Furthermore, as we will see with all three characters, this support quickly coalesces into an explicit critique of the violence of patriarchal masculinity. Emilia tells Desdemona that
marriage “shows us a man/They are all but stomachs, and we all but food;/They eat us hungerly, and when they are full,/ they belch us” (3.4.120-124). Earlier, we have seen at some length the reductive rhetoric reducing women to a part of their body—the tongue. Emilia applies the same metynomic logic to the opposite sex, intentionally reducing men in the same way: “all but stomachs,” capable of being fully known within a few years of marriage. Men are not more complex, more important, or more human than women—they are less, simple, destructive, digestive. Women, she argues, are victims of men’s ceaseless hunger, to be consumed and then belched away, reduced to nothing but air and waste. And if there is a reduction of women, it is the fault of men.

As soon as Emilia has introduced the rhetoric of jealousy, and the critique of violent, consumptive, misogynistic masculinity, into her discourse, this language begins to pervade it. While Desdemona searches for other reasons for Othello’s sudden harshness towards her—she proposes to Emilia that it is “something, sure, of state,” that has effected this transformation in him—Emilia insists, again and again, on raising the monstrous specter of jealousy (3.4.161). Emilia prays that the cause is “no conception/Nor no jealous toy concerning you [Desdemona]” that has so unsettled Othello (3.4.176-177). When Desdemona responds that she has given him no cause for such jealousy, seeking to use her own innocence as a shield for her husband, Emilia forcefully returns to the rhetoric of jealousy, repeating the word a half-dozen times in her reply: “Jealous souls will not be answered so./ They are not ever jealous for the cause,/ But jealous for they’re jealous. It is a monster/ Begot upon itself, born on itself.” (3.4.180-184). The monstrous, masculine hunger of her earlier speech is shadowed here. Jealousy lacks complexity, reason, and sense—it is the self-perpetuating ouroboros of men who cannot trust their control over women.
Note, also, the shift in Emilia’s rhetorical style here. She began the play almost entirely passive, barely speaking. Her initial attempts at advocacy for herself were brief, consisted of questions rather than statements, and she continued to mirror Desdemona’s language, rather than choosing her own, throughout the initial dialogue. Furthermore, she called on religious language, praying and giving an “Amen” to Desdemona’s speech, as if to legitimize what she is saying through a mode of communication that is more acceptable for women to use, the language of faith. When Emilia first begins to speak for herself, she is not yet explicitly embracing the “shrewish” mode of communication that Paulina, for instance, does from the first.

But once Emilia has begun acting on Desdemona’s behalf, she soon shifts into this role. When Othello initially confronts Emilia, looking for evidence of Desdemona’s infidelity with Cassio by interrogating her nearest companion, she begins with short, flat denials, mirroring her diction at the beginning of the play when she denied her own husband’s accusation of her shrewishness. “Never, my lord,” “Never,” and “Never, my lord,” she repeats, brief and relatively rote (4.2.7, 9, 11). But, when Othello seems to hesitate, and perhaps to have finished his accusation, Emilia speaks at greater length. “I durst, my lord, to wager she is honest,” she begins, the initial phrase marking her own sense of daring, of violating class and gendered norms around speech, to express her own mind (4.2.12).

Though this beginning seems in line with the expectations around appropriate speech for women to which we have seen Emilia conform, she continues at length, and for the first time in the play we see the ferocity of the rhetoric she is capable of, mustered here in Desdemona’s defense. The religious language she used earlier is mirrored here, but rather than representing a simple support of someone else’s statement, as it did in her conversation with Desdemona, it is
now a source of evidence for her own argument. She is willing to “lay down [her] soul at stake” in defense of Desdemona’s fidelity, and wishes the Biblical “serpent’s curse”\(^\text{15}\) on anyone who has convinced Othello otherwise (4.2.14, 18). The religious framing of Emilia’s speech is no longer a way for her to make her ideas more acceptable—it is now a rhetorical tool in the service of them.

Despite the power of her diction, Emilia’s response fails to effect the change she hopes to create. Again, we see excessive female speech received as evidence of female sexual impropriety. After Emilia has obeyed his command to summon Desdemona, his immediate response to her defense of Desdemona is simple: “she [Emilia] says enough” (4.2.22). But enough in what sense? Enough to vindicate Desdemona’s honesty? Enough to incriminate herself? Perhaps enough to introduce some doubt into Othello’s mind? The last seems likely as he pivots in the next statement: “Yet she’s a simple bawd/ That cannot say as much” (4.2.22-23). Emilia, in her defense of Desdemona, has become a “bawd,” a sexually immoral and excessive creature herself.

When Desdemona and Emilia arrive, he dismisses her again, not in the straightforwardly commanding tones of before, but with a pointed sarcasm and repeated references to her supposed role as a pimp. “Leave procreants alone, and shut the door./Cough, or cry “hem,” if anybody come,” he commands her, with the play on words between “procreant” and “supplicant” suggesting a corruption of religious matters as well as a degradation of Emilia’s station, from respectable attendant to degraded brothel-keeper (4.2.34-35). He commands her to perform her

\(^{15}\) In Genesis 3.14, G-d curses the serpent to go on its belly “all the days of [its] life,” to eat dust, and to be the enemy of Eve and her descendants. Significantly, “the serpent’s curse” is a divine punishment for the temptation of Eve: another crime committed through speech.
“function” and her “mystery”, staging himself as the client, Desdemona as the prostitute, and Emilia as the door-keeper who makes this illicit encounter possible (4.2.32, 36). The logic conflating excessive speech and excessive sexuality is again clearly at play here.

Emilia has already been the target of gendered insults earlier in the play, when she was largely silent and apparently conformed to appropriate female behavior, as her husband began the play by accusing her of being chiding. Now, though, that she has actually begun to embody this description, she is subject to even more criticism from the male characters in the play, criticism that focuses intently on her perceived implication in Desdemona’s alleged sexual wrongdoing. By speaking out of turn, Emilia has made herself vulnerable to the same accusations that plague Desdemona, mirroring the dichotomy of unrestricted speech and unrestricted sex that has been discussed earlier. The more she speaks, the more she is accused: not just of scolding, but of adulterous behavior herself.

In addition to the ways these concepts are entangled in other works, including in the classical antecedents referenced by Carson above, Emilia herself has been subject to the accusation that she must be sexually immoral because of her excess speech already. Iago’s initial insults to her dance back and forth readily between criticisms of her “tongue” and complaints that she (and other women) are “players in your huswifery/and huswifes in your bed” (2.1.124-125). Iago likewise, even as she gives him the stolen handkerchief, accuses her of being “a common thing” and “a foolish wife” (3.3.346, 348). Although Emilia’s actual words and behavior onstage give no indication that she has ever been less than faithful, the accusation of sexual immorality seems to plague her throughout, in parallel to the label of scolding that
attaches to her. Iago at one point suggests that he suspects her of adultery with Othello, a claim which seems to have no proof whatsoever.

The further Emilia moves into her “scolding” mode of speech, the more she is targeted by these accusations—but even remaining silent and innocent cannot protect her from them entirely. Once again, she is caught in a double bind. This notion, as named by feminist scholar Marilyn Frye, compares the situation of women to a bird caught in a cage. Women are “caught between systemically related pressures,” and it is this which constitutes oppression itself (11). Whether Emilia speaks or is silent, she will be called a shrew. Whether Desdemona is chaste or guilty, she will be called an adulteress. These pressures, entangled with each other and with their own opposites, form an impossible tangle for Emilia.

Perhaps in response to this pressure, though, Emilia’s willingness to speak continues to grow. The question of appropriate or inappropriate female speech is again centered in Emilia’s next appearance onstage, when she rushes on to confront the devastated Desdemona. Reporting recent events to Iago, Emilia has to take an uncharacteristically active verbal role in the scene, even more so than she did in Desdemona’s defense earlier. This is all the more notable in contrast to the other character onstage, as Desdemona has been rendered silent by Othello’s abuse. Desdemona is, apparently literally, unable to describe what has just happened. At first, she requests total silence, incapable of any response, even weeping: “Do not talk to me, Emilia./I cannot weep, nor answers have I none” (4.2.118-120). Emilia’s questions receive no answer, and

16 Although the question of Iago’s motivation for his destruction of Othello’s life will likely remain a rousing topic of critical debate in the field forever, I think few scholars would argue that his passing claim that Othello “’twixt my sheets/hath done my office” is the real reason (1.3.430).
Desdemona is apparently confused and almost incoherent. She cannot even express herself in a purely emotional way.

Even when actively trying to communicate what she has just endured to Iago, she “cannot tell,” she cannot speak “that name” which she has just been called by her husband (4.2.129, 137). In describing what has happened, she makes use of multiple layers of distancing rhetoric. When Iago asks for clarification, she refers back to Emilia, defining "that name" as "such as she said my lord did say I was" (4.2.140). Desdemona can only approach the accusation of sexual immorality through repeated modes of hearsay—not what she is, or even what she was called, but what someone else reports that she was told she was. Desdemona here subtly reveals the powerful connection between female silence and female chastity.

By refusing to repeat what she has been accused of, she further distances herself from culpability, for both her on-stage audience of Iago and Emilia, and for the actual audience. As a stage character, she is in a very real way constituted by those words that she speaks, as well as by the actions she commits. If she cannot speak a word, how can she deserve to be called by it? Desdemona’s argument here internalizes and reiterates the entanglement of shrewishness and adultery, of speech and sex, that characterizes the oppression which engulfs her in the play.

The explicit argument of her innocence that she makes to Iago relies, in part, on her very inability to speak, at least to speak in ways outside the strictest bounds of female proprietary, of chastity in both word and deed. “I cannot say “whore”—/It does abhor me now I speak the word./ To do the act that might the addition earn, Not the world’s mass of vanity could make me,” she declares. This is how she ends her longest speech in the play, her address to Iago where she begs his help in regaining Othello’s love (4.2.190-194). A woman like herself, a woman who
is restrained and appropriate in speech, cannot, she argues, deserve the unspeakable title of “whore”. She can only talk *around* it. Her silence becomes the sign of her virtue.

Emilia, on the other hand, has no such compunctions about the word. Her earlier attitude of silence and verbal restraint has been completely abandoned. She uses the word “whore,” the very word that Desdemona cannot bring herself to say, four times in this scene alone. In some sense, this functions as mere clarification on the level of the plot—she has to explain what happened for Iago’s benefit, as Desdemona cannot bring herself to speak. However, she also seems to make use of the power inherent in the word. Her very first usage of it is strange, in which she creates the compound "bewhored"--the epithet "whore" is transformed from something Desdemona is, to something Othello has done to her, the blame and responsibility for this immorality shifted from Desdemona's chastity or lack thereof to her husband's violence towards her. It is worth noting here that "bewhored" seems to be one of those words Shakespeare himself invented, putting even more emphasis on the importance of this linguistic reversal.

Each of the times that Emilia uses the word "whore," or a derivative like "bewhored," she is clearly putting the blame back on Othello--as well as, unknowingly, upon Iago. She begins with a metaphor that clearly suggests that Othello, by so mistreating his wife, has lowered his own status. This is a reversal of the logic underlying the appropriateness of women's speech--here, it is how a man speaks *to* a woman that degrades his station: "He called her 'whore.' A beggar in his drink/Could not have laid such terms upon his callet" (4.2.141-142). He is no longer the general, or the “lord” that Desdemona has just named him—he has reduced himself to the status of a beggar by failing to act honorably towards his wife. Emilia's next claim is a more straightforward appeal to emotion: "Hath she [Desdemona] forsook so many noble matches,/Her
father and her country and her friends, / To be called “whore”? Would it not make one weep?” (4.2.146-149). While Desdemona’s reference to weeping is impotent and silent, unable even to make this affective protest against how she has been mistreated, Emilia’s is an inclusive call to action. It encompasses everyone onstage, and, with the nonspecific address of “one,” the audience as well.

These moments of weaponizing the word "whore" against male, not female, targets, are significant, but perhaps most potent is when Emilia inadvertently stumbles on the play’s central tragedy. She insists that "some eternal villain, /Some busy and insinuating rogue,/Some cogging, cozening slave, to get some office," must have "devised this slander" (4.2.153-155). This "villain", this "rogue," and this "slave," is of course her own husband, Iago. Finally, she asks, "Why should he call her “whore”?") and proceeds to answer her own question: because "the Moor’s abused by some most villainous knave,/Some base notorious knave, some scurvy fellow" (4.2.160, 164-166). Emilia is again reprimanded, by Iago this time, cautioning her to "speak within door" (4.2.167). This casts a certain suspicious pall on his previous critiques of her excessive speech, since here he is clearly acting in his own defense, and, again, those of us in the audience already know it. It also, obviously, anticipates Carson’s earlier argument—that an ultimate patriarchal fantasy is to “put a door on the female mouth” (121).

This moment is of central significance in understanding the mechanics of speech, gender, and genre in how Shakespeare approaches the false-infidelity narrative. For the first time in the play, what is centered here is Emilia's absolute facticity. Other critics, like June Sturrock, have written on this same issue: other characters, like the audience, she argues, are expected to recognize Emilia’s interventions in this late moment in the play as “a kind of release for the
audience by voicing its ordinary spontaneous "low " reactions to the speech and actions of the
major characters” (5). McEachern makes a similar point: that we, the audience, are so disturbed
by the play’s tragedy exactly because “we know the protagonist to be in error” 134). That is,
Emilia has the same knowledge, and much the same reactions, as the increasingly frustrated
audience watching this tragedy of misunderstandings play out.

Emilia, unlike any other character in the play, is well aware that Othello is being
deceived, that Desdemona is being slandered, and that all this is devised by a villain who wants
to win himself some higher office. Even without direct knowledge of the truth of the accusations,
she has untangled the play’s central plot mechanisms and mysteries. It is she that provides a
literal voice to the silent, watching audience. It is she alone that has recognized the truth, even
without being able to name it in all its specificity17. The tragedy, then, is that, this truth coming
from the condemned and marginalized female voice, no one listens.

Leading into the penultimate scene, we see other characters begin to recognize Emilia's
newly claimed powers of speech, though they, tragically, do not listen to what she has to say.
Othello, already plotting to murder Desdemona, insists on one particular thing for preparation.
Desdemona herself does a fair amount of staging of the play’s tragic final tableau. She has
Emilia dress her; she has the bed made up with her wedding sheets. But Othello has only one
intervention into the setting of this stage. He insists that she dismiss Emilia. This is likely at least
partially a practical concern, so that Emilia will not witness the murder he is going to commit.

17 McEachern’s analysis of this dynamic between Emilia and the audience focuses on the later
moment in the play when she finally realizes her own role in the play’s tragedy. Although this is
perhaps the pivotal moment in the play’s dynamic of female speech, and I will discuss it in some
detail shortly, it is significant that the audience already knows Emilia to be correct here.
However, his insistence on this is so vociferous that it indicates a deeper importance. He instructs Desdemona to dismiss Emilia, reinforcing the command with the further words, "Look that't be done," suggesting that he may recognize that Emilia, in particular, poses some danger to his plans (4.3.9). The later text also suggests that this emphasis has been felt by the characters as well, as in the subsequent lines, Desdemona twice refers immediately to her instruction to dismiss Emilia. Perhaps, then, Othello is subconsciously aware of Emilia's newfound powers of speech, and wishes her, particularly, to be absent from his coming confrontation with Desdemona. He may fear her words as much as he fears her witnessing.

Although Emilia is not onstage for Desdemona's last encounter with Othello, she is given a chance to speak her mind on the wrongs men do to women. However, Desdemona is her only audience. The two women discuss the possibility of adultery, Desdemona taking the (perhaps excessively) naive view that there is no "such woman" who would "abuse her husband in such gross kind," and certainly that she herself would "not do such a deed for the whole world" (4.3.69, 89, 94). Emilia, whether jokingly or not, claims that she would betray her husband, but only "for the whole world"--not lightly or easily, but under the right circumstances. Nor does she allow Desdemona to dwell on this hypothetical, launching instead to one of the most surprising and powerful monologues in the play. "And yet I think it is their husbands' faults if wives do fall," Emilia contends, reversing the dynamic of blame for sexual immorality so central to early modern social thought (4.3.97).

Unfortunately, there is no one but Desdemona, who dismisses her readily, to hear Emilia's great monologue in defense of women. When she is at last able to speak to another audience, one who might have the power to change the reception of Desdemona's perceived infidelity, or to
believe either her own or Emilia's pleas of her innocence, it is too late to save Desdemona, or
even herself. Though Emilia finds her voice to speak against the silencing pressures placed on
her as a woman relatively early in the play, no one listens.

The treatment of Emilia's speech, and how it evolves throughout the play, stands in
virulent contrast to the presentation of other characters, most notably Beatrice. As has already
been discussed, Beatrice is much more comfortable with the initial appellation of shrewishness
than Emilia is. She does not temper her speech depending on her audience, and in fact is
criticized early on by male characters for being "too curst"—her uncle fears she will "never get
thee a husband if thou be so shrewd of thy tongue" (2.1.17, 18). Leonato's level of seriousness
here is not entirely clear, though elsewhere in the play he takes the marital prospects of his
daughter seriously enough that it seems unlikely he has no concerns about his ward and niece,
Beatrice's. Regardless of how Leonato intends the statement, though, Beatrice treats the threat of
being "too curst," that is, too shrewish (according to an OED definition) as a pure joke. The fact
that she quite literally carries the bulk of the lines for the remainder of the scene suggests the
power granted to her speech by the play’s text itself.

Although not evidently serious, Beatrice's response to these accusations of shrewishness
upend the power dynamic inherent in early modern configurations of gender and speech. She
hopes aloud that, as a result of the very shrewishness for which she is criticized, she will indeed
remain unmarried, "for the which blessing I am at Him upon my knees every morning and
evening" (2.1.26-27). This is an extraordinary reversal of the typical assumptions around gender
and marriage in the period. Even other women in the play, like Hero, are concerned with their
marital prospects, or at least others are concerned for them. But Beatrice dismisses and even
seems to disdain the possibility of marriage. Her response turns the critique of her excessive speech, her status as a “curst cow,” into an opportunity to explore the faults of men as a group.

She also here mobilizes the same animal imagery that has earlier been established as such a universal aspect of misogynistic attacks on women’s speech as part of her joke, though a slightly obscure part. She also refers to her own “short horns,” and puts Leonato in the position of suggesting that G-d will “send her none [that is, no horns” (2.1.24-25). The language here is particularly notable in its reference to “horns”—the universal symbol of male cuckoldry. Yet Beatrice seems to be suggesting (as Benedick repeatedly does elsewhere in the play) that part of the danger of marriage, for her, is potentially being the victim of infidelity, being cuckolded herself.

Later in the play, Benedick will admiringly say of Beatrice that she “hast frighted the word out of his right sense, so forcible is thy wit” (5.2.55). This would seem to neatly encapsulate what Beatrice’s wit, even in this early moment in the play, does to the assumptions about gender, speech, and sexual immorality embedded in the lines of other characters. Her responses, though apparently light and joking in tone, turn the gendering of particular images on their heads, and reverse assumptions about women’s roles in society and in relationships. This is no isolated case, either—she “mocks all her wooers out of suit,” perhaps intentionally using her

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18 Again, although this thesis focuses on gender to the exclusion of other significant social dynamics, it is worth considering how the specter of class intervenes in this conversation. Beatrice seems to be in a peculiar social situation for an early modern woman, as she is clearly under the guardianship of her uncle Leonato (and later explicitly stated to be his heir after Hero), but also has a degree of freedom in her decision-making not typical of a ward. Unlike Emilia, who is doubly implicated as both a woman, and as someone of a secondary social class to Othello and Desdemona, Beatrice appears to be in an economic position to reject the institution of marriage entirely.

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intelligence and her verbal prowess in order to avoid marriage (2.1.341). Unlike Emilia, accused of shrewishness although she is silent for much of the first half of the play, Beatrice has claimed her powers of speech from the beginning, and in doing so destabilized many of the assumptions about gender that underlie the world of the play.

And from early in the play, when Beatrice speaks in a gender-transgressive way, or is accused of doing so by other characters (mostly Benedick, jokingly, or Leonato, scoldingly), she is able to defend her own right to do so. At the masked dance during which Hero and Claudio become engaged, Benedick and Beatrice dance together, neither recognizing the other, and swap insults in an equitable fashion that bears no resemblance to Iago’s satirization of women or Leontes’ attacks on Paulina. As Benedick later (quite inaccuracy) recounts their conversation to the prince, he refers to Beatrice as "this harpy" and "my Lady Tongue," both explicitly terms that belong to the misogynistic discourse about female speech so prevalent in the period (2.1.266, 269). However, Benedick’s mockery is, as always, not of women, but of Beatrice. It is exquisite in its specificity, a feature of this discourse that becomes increasingly evident as Benedick’s insults against Beatrice become obviously an expression of his love for her.

Benedick's critiques of Beatrice are, once again, not quite identical in character or tone to those Iago levels against Emilia or Leonato against Paulina. Benedick's hyperbole is so obvious here—because the stakes of the conversation are very low, because the audience has had the opportunity to witness what happened (and therefore just how laughably inaccurate Benedick's versions of events are), because his language is so overblown—that it hardly seems like a genuine critique of Beatrice. Furthermore, certain keywords in his language involuntarily suggest his admiration for her, as is the case nearly every time Benedick talks about Beatrice in the play.
When he says that she "huddled jest upon jest with such impossible conveyance upon me that I stood, like a man at a mark, with a whole army shooting at me," or that "she speaks poniards, and every word stabs," he is acknowledging Beatrice's verbal power as dangerous in a specifically military metaphor, granting her a form of power, through her speech, that would normally be considered wholly inaccessible to a woman (2.1.241-244). He also proclaims, apropos of exactly nothing, "I would not marry her though she were endowed that Adam had with him when he transgressed" (2.1.246-248). This declaration, for the careful reader or performer, necessarily raises the question of why, exactly, marrying Beatrice is so near the forefront of Benedick's mind.

Even more significant than the difference in how Benedick critiques Beatrice’s speech, however, is the difference in how this criticism is received, and especially how it is received by other male characters of status. It is not the case that no one of import listens to Benedick's perhaps-sardonic monologue--indeed, the Prince immediately brings up the subject to Beatrice. However, he does not repeat Benedick's suggestion that she has said too much, or used her words too stridently. Instead, he focuses on the affective relationships at play, telling her that she has "lost the heart of Signior Benedick" (2.1.270). If she is being criticized, it is for the specifics of her relationship with him, not her speech. And again, where Iago (and, for that matter, Othello) speak of women’s behavior in the most general and universalizing of terms, mention of Beatrice’s speech always constructs her as absolutely singular, a figure of admiration more than of contempt.

Indeed, later in the same scene, the Prince, perhaps the ultimate figure of male authority in the play as a representative of royalty and a military leader, proposes to Beatrice, whether jokingly or not. She replies with a joke, and quickly tries to cover up the awkwardness: "I
beseech Your Grace pardon me, I was born to speak all mirth and no matter”—perhaps the only place in the play, before her revelation regarding her feelings for Benedick, that she engages in sincere self-reflection (2.1.324). Yet, rather than expressing a condemnation of Beatrice's talkativeness, even when she has just rejected his offer of marriage, even when she is offering up such a critique herself, the Prince does not only allow her self-expression, but insist upon it: "Your silence most offends me, and to be merry best becomes you," a fairly direct reversal of the early modern ethic that found women's speech to be offensive, inappropriate in sacred settings, and even sometimes illegal (2.1.325). Beatrice's speech is thus declared suitable for her and approved of by the greatest figure of patriarchal authority present in the play.

Indeed, the most outright criticism of Beatrice's speech in the play comes from female sources--from Ursula and Hero, in the attempt to fool her into believing Benedick is in love with her. At the beginning of this scene, Hero instructs Margaret to retrieve Beatrice from the parlor, where she will be found "proposing with the Prince and Claudio”—an interesting, and easily-overlooked, detail which further suggests the distinct way that Beatrice's speech is treated by the figures of masculine power in the play. In this context, because of the word's etymological history and the usage here, "proposing" seems likely to hold one of the now-archaic meanings related to "forming an intention or design" or "to put forward or present for consideration or discussion" (OED 1a, 2a). We never hear more about this conversation from any character, and it is not an onstage scene, so it is impossible to know exactly what Beatrice, Claudio, and the Prince are "proposing" about, but it is certainly noteworthy that she seems to be in regular, perhaps political, conversation with two of the highest-status male characters in the play.
That said, the conversation that follows rather punctures the positive impression of Beatrice established elsewhere in the play. She is "disdainful", "coy and wild," "so self-endeared" that she is incapable of love, and "odd and from all fashions" (3.1.35, 36, 58, 77). All of these insults come from Hero, and they are all being staged for Beatrice's benefit. It is unclear whether Hero means any of them in any kind of earnest--she talks more in this scene than she does anywhere else in the play, and though she gives Margaret and Ursula instructions for how they are to act in Beatrice's deception, she does not share her own plan with them, so it is impossible to read her motivations here. Regardless, some doubt must be cast on the seriousness of these criticisms of Beatrice because of the circumstances in which they occur.

Beatrice, however, takes them seriously. She vows to set aside her "contempt" and her "maiden pride," and to accept Benedick's love (3.2.115). This is certainly a notable transformation for Beatrice, and one with great consequence in terms of the plot. However, it does not represent a change in the nature of her speech. Beatrice makes no reference to speech as a mode of her previous failure to behave in a normative, acceptably feminine way, nor does she profess any intention to change that. What she intends, and what she will perform, is an affective and internal transformation, not an external, behavioral one.

Thus we see from an early point in the play how different the milieu in which Beatrice conducts her relatively free speech is than that of Othello. Beatrice, in spite of her gender, talks at length to all the most powerful figures in the play--and is used to being received with amusement at least and often serious consideration and praise, rather than the sort of misogynistic mockery or outright violence that Emilia faces. This is most apparent in the scene where the two play's plots most closely align--the devastating failed wedding of Act 4, Scene 1.
Initially, this is one of the most male-dominated scenes in the play. Beatrice is present from the beginning as part of Hero's marital retinue, but she does not speak even single word. This is, by far, her longest period of silence in the play. Hero’s replies (as is fairly typical of the character) are short and proper to the point of scriptedness: "I do," and "none, my lord" (4.1.10, 16). The rare moments of female speech in this scene are interspersed between long, virulently misogynistic, and often violent monologues from the male characters, as they debate the mostly-silent Hero's fate. Eventually, she swoons—a silent action, and probably the only acceptably feminine response in this situation—and her accusers leave.

This is where Beatrice's intervention begins. The first notable aspect of Beatrice's speech in this scene is her exclusive focus on Hero's well-being. The very first thing she says, as Hero faints, is "How now, cousin, wherefore sink you down?" (4.1.115). This is a nearly nonsensical question given the circumstances--obviously, Hero is falling into a swoon because of the shame of the accusation leveled against her, as all the men onstage (and particularly Hero's father) seem to agree. Beatrice, on the converse, phrases her question as though she does not understand Hero's illness, although the reasons for it are evident. This suggests what the rest of Beatrice’s speech will make explicit: that she does not care about the accusations made against Hero, only for Hero herself. She continues by calling desperately for help, "Dead, I think.—Help, uncle!—Hero, why Hero! Uncle! Signior Benedick! Friar!" (4.1.120). The staccato punctuation here implies Beatrice's desperation for Hero's health. It is also noteworthy that she is not engaging at all in the broader conversation, acknowledging only Benedick's address of her when he inquires how Hero is doing. Beatrice ignores, or simply does not hear, the debate over Hero's guilt or innocence. At this point, her only interest is in Hero's well-being.
Having drawn the attention of the men onstage to Hero, Beatrice falls silence once again, speaking up only to provide information in Hero's defense. She does not engage in the debate between Leonato and the Friar regarding Hero's innocence. Onstage, this is often represented by having Beatrice be entirely absorbed in caring for the prone Hero, further reflecting the point analyzed above, that Beatrice’s interest is primarily, even exclusively, for Hero’s well-being. Though she does protest that “my cousin is belied,” she calls for help, from the men onstage—her uncle, Benedick, and the friar, representatives of paternal, romantic, and religious male authority—not to defend Hero’s reputation, but to revive her from her near-death swoon (4.1.155).

Beatrice acts in contradiction to the dichotomy that the men onstage, and particularly Leonato, set up around Hero's accusation--that she is either a virgin and innocent, or unfaithful, and thus worthy of death. For Beatrice, this distinction is unimportant, or at the very least secondary. Whether Hero is innocent or guilty, she deserves care and support, not to be shamed and humiliated. Her life has value to Beatrice outside of her compliance with sexual norms.

It is thus without intervention from Beatrice or from the semi-conscious Hero that the figures of fatherly and religious male authority decide on the far-fetched plan of faking Hero’s death to attempt to spark some remorse from Claudio. If this fails, the Friar declares and Leonato agrees, Hero will be confined “as best befits her wounded reputation/in some reclusive and religious life/out of all eyes, tongues, minds, and injuries” (4.1.251-254). Beatrice offers no opinion here, and Hero’s is not solicited. This is a plan that relies on restoring female obedience through silence. If Hero’s nominally lost virginity cannot be restored—if she cannot be returned to a state of appropriately obedient female sexual behavior—then she will be removed from the
world altogether, placed in a state of appropriately obedient female speech, that is, silence. And it is exactly this silence that both Hero and Beatrice display in this moment of shock, after the explosion of male rage and power that has dominated the scene up to this point.

However, after Hero is led offstage by her father and the Friar, a brief epilogue scene between Beatrice and Benedick reveals the depth of the difference in how Emilia and Beatrice speak their defenses of the wrongfully accused woman—and how they are received. Emilia’s anger only manifests in its entirety when she is alone with Desdemona, or, tragically, when it is too late and Desdemona lies dead onstage. Beatrice, on the other hand, is able to choose a confidant better equipped, in the patriarchal play-world, to actually disrupt the potentially tragic course of the play. It is Benedick, a figure of some male authority, to whom she speaks.

Beatrice is hyper-conscious of her own limited power in this scene. She repeatedly regrets that defending Hero is “a man’s office” and that she cannot be “a man for [Claudio’s] sake”—that is, to deliver the physical punishment that Claudio, she believes, merits for his mistreatment of Hero (4.1.280, 320). Yet she does not hesitate to use the power that she does have, and that other characters have recognized within her, throughout the entire play—the power of speech.

This is clear from the structure of the scene—the short, quippy dialogue between Beatrice and Benedick mirrors their verbal sparring of early scenes in the play. Beatrice’s lines draw Benedick in, to his confession of love and his promise to do “anything for thee” (4.1.302). This provides an interesting point of comparison with Winter’s Tale, and Paulina’s daring assertion that “the office [of defending Hermione against Leontes’ false accusations] becomes a woman best” (2.2.41). Beatrice seems to believe the exact opposite—but then, it is not a verbal defense of Hero, but a physical one, that she seeks here.

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is Beatrice’s opportunity to demand the restitution she believes Hero requires, and considers herself incapable of providing. That is, in what must be her shortest line in the entire play, she instructs Benedick to “kill Claudio” (4.1.304). He replies with apparent humor and a denial, perhaps imitating the mode of their earlier banter. Then again, I have also seen it staged where he treats this plea with the same deadly seriousness with which she utters it (as, for instance, in the 2014 production starring David Tennant and Catherine Tate, where Tate is visibly sobbing throughout the entire scene). Regardless of the staging, this is, as McEachern indicates, “the most magnetic moment” in the play (129). Beatrice’s powers of speech, already recognized by herself, other characters, and the audience as impressive, begin to reach their apex here.

However, the play does not let us forget that she still operates in a social world where, as a woman, her power is always limited. This is demonstrated visibly for the audience when Beatrice tries to leave the room, and Benedick attempts to prevent her. From the dialogue, Benedick is evidently blocking Beatrice from the exit, as she repeatedly pleads with him to “let [her] go,” obviously suggesting that she cannot simply leave the room (4.1.309). Her lack of physical strength, compared to the male Benedick, is thus as evident in stage action as it is in her

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20 This is a scene that poses curious issues for theatrical directors of contemporary productions. Given current social mores around male expressions of violence, it is very difficult to stage—for Benedick to actually physically prevent Beatrice from leaving the room, as she struggles to get past him and begs him to let her leave, would cast a dark and disturbing pall over the charm of their relationship, typically one of the highlights of the production. Recent stagings, for instance, the 2019 Public Theatre production at Shakespeare in the Park, attempt to sidestep this issue by simply having Benedick stand in the doorway, not touching Beatrice. This makes the line “I pray you let me go” rather nonsensical (4.1.309). It also undercuts one of the most important messages this scene has to send about gender—that Benedick, as a man, has a physical strength that Beatrice does not. While this may not line up with objective biological fact or with contemporary social ideals about gender, it is a belief substantially embedded in the text, and which serves as a necessary backdrop to the ways Beatrice uses the power she does possess: the power of speech.
words. She cannot get offstage if he tries to stop her, and certainly cannot hope to do what she believes most needs to be done—to kill Claudio.

However, the scene also continues to center the fact that Beatrice also has a level of power that no one else in the play can come close to in her verbal prowess. Earlier in the play, the relationship between Beatrice and Benedick is described as a “kind of merry war,” and early scenes certainly have that feeling—of an evenly matched skirmish (1.1.60). Beatrice may slightly verbally dominate Benedick in their scenes together, with him often leaving her to have the last word, but their conversations rely on a give and take. This is evident even from a cursory examination of the script in these early scenes, as their scenes tend to have a roughly equitable distribution of dialogue between the two characters. Their “merry war” is something they create together, and it displays their wit equally.

In this scene, however, that dynamic shifts. Even earlier in this scene, Beatrice draws Benedick into a shared dialogue. But once he has refused to kill Claudio and stopped Beatrice from leaving the room, the full power of her speech is unfurled against him, for the first and only time in the play. Beatrice reveals the enormous depths of her fury, her desire for revenge, and her sensitivity to the immense wrong done to Hero in a variety of speeches that run together almost as a soliloquy—for Benedick literally cannot get a word in edgewise21. His lines become increasingly short and interrupted attempts to get out Beatrice’s name, none of which are successful. Beatrice, on the other hand, has all the space she needs to perform a vast feat of

21 Indeed, every time I have worked on Much Ado in production, that express instruction is given to the actor playing Beatrice in this scene—don’t hold for Benedick’s interruptions, just keep going like you’re giving a monologue. His lines are simply too short, and too unimportant, to be worth waiting for in the staging of the play, and they often have to be “jumped” so that the pace of her speech can be preserved.
rhetorical persuasion. She begins with her attack on Claudio, who, she explains, is “in the height a villain,” and explains what she would do to him if she were a man herself—famously, “eat his heart in the marketplace” (4.2.315). Beatrice’s verbal violence, in the form of threats, is far more powerful and memorable than Benedick’s physical power in this scene. The latter can be excised from a production, but Beatrice's lines are indelible.

Yet this is not a conflict in the sense that Beatrice and Benedick, as characters or as avatars of masculine and feminine values, have come into conflict earlier in the play. Although they do have differing perspectives, Benedick's hardly appears—he does not explain his objection to killing Claudio, nor offer any rebuttal to Beatrice's arguments. If this is a battle, she is the only one fighting. Furthermore, the scene's ultimate conclusion does not erase the value of Benedick's masculine worldview. As cited above, Beatrice is consistently hyper-aware of her dependence on the forms of male power that she cannot access herself. The true triumph of her power in this scene is her ability to leverage those forms where they manifest—in Leonato, in the friar, and above all, in Benedick—for her more humane ends. This is what separates her linguistic work, and the comic ending she is able to manifest through it, from the tragedy that faces Emilia's attempts to speak. When Beatrice speaks, she is heard.

Beatrice's spoken power depends on being able to leverage the male characters she is close to in order to match her own goals. However, she does not ultimately take direct action herself. It is this which distinguishes Beatrice from how Paulina's speech operates in The Winter's Tale. Paulina's insistence on her own power sets her apart from the other two characters from the very beginning, as she insists that "the office" of persuading the king that his wife is
innocent "becomes a woman best" (2.2.40-41). She continues to press this case throughout
Hermione's trial.

Like Beatrice at Hero's wedding, Paulina is onstage when Hermione is wrongly
condemned, and watches her collapse. She is likewise much more concerned with Hermione's
well-being than any of the men onstage are. Just as Beatrice disengages from the debate over
Hero's chastity to speak only of Hero's health, Paulina does not respond verbally to the oracle's
declaration of Hermione's innocence, Leontes' belated recognition of it, or the tragic revelation
that the young prince Mamillius has also been struck dead. As Leontes considers the "heavens
themselves," the lofty (and masculinized) ideals of religion and justice, Paulina focuses intently
on the stricken Hermione (3.2.160).

But, unlike Beatrice, Paulina does not approach Hermione exclusively as a caretaker or
protector. Although she speaks of her, she does not speak only to her, or on her behalf. Instead,
she positions herself as a critic, as she calls out to Leontes: "The news is mortal to the queen/look
down, and see what death is doing" (3.2.162-163). Perhaps this is a cry of pure grief. But perhaps
it is intended to grant her a measure of power over the obviously unstable Leontes—that is,
perhaps her speech here is performative, reaching out to Leontes as the audience rather than
directed to Hermione in a manner that would be analogous to how Beatrice's concern is to and
for Hero.

The scene also takes the same structure as Act 4, Scene 2 of Much Ado About Nothing,
where Beatrice waits for the remnants of ritual surrounding the wedding to end, and most of the
men to depart, before starting to speak. It is only after Hermione has been ushered offstage, and
the trial come to its conclusion, that Paulina's vocal power takes its full form. However, there are
critical differences here. Paulina is not addressing Leontes alone, in the kind of private and
intimate space that Beatrice and Benedick eventually occupy in their equivalent scene. Instead,
they are in the open court, with an unspecified number of onlookers. Paulina and Leontes'
dialogue is regularly interrupted by an unnamed "lord," possibly a different character each time
(the stage direction for the entrance in this scene refers to multiple "lords and officers"), but
regardless indicating the very public nature of this confrontation.

Furthermore, the manipulation in which Paulina engages in this scene is far more blatant
than that which Beatrice conducts. Beatrice begins to speak only when Benedick prompts her to,
slowly builds up to the fabulous rage that is a centerpiece of the scene and, arguably, the entire
play. Her initial responses are clipped and brief. It is hard to imagine a staging of that scene
where her fear and grief for Hero is not genuine. In conversation with Kaite Brandt, the actor
who portrayed the role when I directed the play, she stated that Beatrice’s sole motivation at the
beginning of that scene is to be left alone with her grief, which strikes me as a likely reading of
the character’s reactions.

Paulina, on the other hand, reenters performing an excess of emotion: "Woe the while/
Oh, cut my lace, lest my heart, cracking it/Break too" (3.2.190-192). This is a complex
statement: first, Paulina's grief may not be based in fact, depending on whether or not she already
knows Hermione is still alive, though that question is never answered in the text. Secondly, her
choice of words focuses attention on her femininity and on her body--the "lace" of her corset,
with the potentially exposing gesture of "cutting" it to reveal her female form underneath, a
deliberate attempt to deploy the feminized power that Paulina understands herself to have.
Finally, the verbal sounds of this dialogue, the repetition of the long vowels of "woe" and "oh,"
create a sense of verbal drama and force the listener to pay particular attention to Paulina's words.

In short, she stages herself a hypertheatrical entrance, with an objective, a costume, and an attention to auditory performance. In performance, her re-entrance is the centerpoint of this scene. It does not have the subtlety or complexity of Beatrice’s reactions in her own scene—I have always seen it staged as a scream, a cry that pulls the onlookers (both onstage and off) inwards, forcing them to focus on her. Paulina does not want to be left alone with her sorrow. She wants everyone to look at, and listen to, her.

This entrance is followed by a brief interjection by one of the previously-mentioned lords, who expresses concern for Paulina by implying she has fallen into insanity, "a fit" (3.2.192). She ignores this entirely, focusing all her energy on Leontes, with a barrage of accusations that mirror Beatrice's critiques of Claudio, though with even stronger language. She imagines herself as the direct victim of Leontes' tyranny, asking him "What studied torments, tyrant, hast for me?/What wheels, racks, fires? What flaying? Boiling/In leads or oils? What old or newer torture/Must I receive, whose every word deserves/To taste of thy most worst?" (3.2.193-197). Like Beatrice, she has a demand to make, but hers is affective, not actionable. She wants him to "run mad indeed, stark mad" with the contemplation of the wrongs he has committed against Polixenes, her own husband Antigonus, his children, Camillo—and most of all Hermione (3.2.202). It is to this final point that she returns at the end of her lengthy soliloquy: "O lords,/When I have said, cry woe!—the Queen, the Queen,/The sweet’st, dear’st creature’s dead, and vengeance for ’t/Not dropped down yet" (3.2.217-220).
Paulina's words here are perhaps the most significant in the play in understanding how female speech functions in *The Winter's Tale*. First, I want to note again the importance of the audience. Here, at the very end of her speech, Paulina flips her stated addressee from Leontes (who she, at least nominally, has been speaking to throughout the speech) to the unnamed "lords" who are present for this trial. Of course, the lords heard—and were meant to hear—her address to Leontes, and Leontes is no doubt meant to hear this, but the change in who is, explicitly, the audience for her speech highlights the importance of the public nature of Paulina's accusations. What Paulina's speech is doing here is not, in the end, identical to Beatrice's. Where Beatrice uses her speech to leverage a private, emotional connection in order to gain access to masculine forms of power, Paulina's speech exists in the public sphere.

One critical aspect of the force of Paulina's speech is logistical. She has to convince a devastated, even disbelieving, public that Hermione is dead. "I say she's dead. I'll swear 't. If word nor oath/Prevail not, go and see," she says, in what can perhaps be read as an extremely high-stakes bluff (3.2.224-225). Hermione, as Paulina perhaps already knows, is in fact alive. If the public, or Leontes, went to find her, they would find this evident truth out.

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22 It is interesting, though beyond the scope of an examination of Paulina's powers of speech in a strict sense, to also consider the imaginative and logistical work she is doing in this scene. She is offstage with the unconscious Hermione for exactly 20 lines, less than a minute of stagetime. Is it here that she comes up with her plan to pass Hermione off for dead in order to test the extent of Leontes' repentance? Does Hermione somehow contribute to that plan? Had Paulina already thought of it, or is she perhaps improvising the lie of Hermione's death when she reenters? All of these questions are completely open to speculation and interpretation—indeed, there are still critics and productions that interpret Hermione's revival as an act of genuine magic. The 2014 Shakespeare in the Park Public Works production, for instance, veered towards this direction. A 2010 production at Shakespeare & Company embraced the magical ending completely. The notion of magic as another form of scrutinized, criticized, and marginalized female power might intersect intriguingly with the ideas proposed in this thesis.
Here, though, Paulina tests the ability of her words to create reality. She deliberately constructs a bimodal test: either the audience of watching lords, and particularly Leontes (note that everyone watching is explicitly identified as male by the script), believes her word alone, or they go to see the dead Hermione for themselves. They apparently do not: modern editions (for instance, the Folger, the Norton, and the Riverside) often indicate this rupture with an emdash, though there is no special punctuation in the Folio—but regardless, no one actually interrupts or, according to the script, exits. The moment passes, the doubt resolves itself, and the focus continues to be on Paulina, who now turns her full attention, and condemnation, back to Leontes, having seized the power to construct reality itself.

Leontes' approach to Paulina's address has been entirely transformed by her successful enaction, through speech, of Hermione's death. “Go on, go on,” he urges her, "Thou canst not speak too much. I have deserved/ All tongues to talk their bitt’rest" (3.2.235-237). Unlike all his past mentions of Paulina's speech, Leontes does not make any note of gender here. Though his address begins as specific ("thou canst not speak to much"), he quickly pivots to the general ("I have deserved all tongues"). It is Paulina herself who reintroduces the gendered nature of her speech, saying that, in chiding the king, she has "shown too much/the rashness of a woman" (3.2.245). It is as though she does not want to let Leontes, or us, forget that this is a woman’s office, as she earlier claimed it to be.

This is noteworthy not just because it showcases the connection that Paulina clearly sees, and reinforces throughout the play, between the power of her speech and her gender, but because "rashness" is not necessarily a gendered term (unlike, for instance, chiding or scolding), and if it is, it might skew masculine. There are 42 uses of the word "rash," "rashly," or "rashness" in
Shakespeare's plays used to describe men and their actions, and this is one of only two uses where it is feminized (along with a small handful that cannot be easily or explicitly gendered). All the rest of the uses are masculine. Paulina’s view of her own speech thus continues the pattern of referring to women’s speech in gendered terms, but disrupts the specifics of it by using an apparently masculine term to describe her own speech. She sees the power of female speech, not as absurd, distasteful, and illegitimate, but as powerful, subversive, and potentially dangerous.

This is again underlined in her next dialogue. Paulina launches into a very different mode of discourse after being scolded by one of the nameless lords onstage: "How'e'er the business goes/you have made fault in the boldness of your speech" (3.2.240). This is a very different proposition about the moral value of speech than what Paulina has previously expressed (that she would speak "til her tongue blister", even to the king, regardless of his threats). Here, the masculine audience—although, notably, not Leontes—reintroduces a more normative reaction to women's speech. Regardless of whether Paulina is right or wrong in her accusations, he says, she should refrain from being so “bold”—another term, like "rash", that carries a heavily masculine signification. Paulina’s speech is no longer being characterized as animalistic, insane, or immoral, but as courageous, even by its critics.

Paulina's reaction to this critique is perhaps one of her most compelling rhetorical gestures in a scene absolutely overstuffed with them. She begins to apologize, in words carefully chosen to further question Leontes' actions: "I am sorry for't/All faults I make, when I shall come to know them, I do repent" (3.3.245). This is an evident dig at Leontes, who has not yet begun to repent for his fault in wrongfully accusing his queen, or at least not quickly enough.
after the oracle helped him "come to know them" (245). "I beseech you rather, let me be punished, that have minded you/of what you should forget," she asks Leontes (3.3.249) Here, she seizes yet more argumentative power. If he does not obey her exhortations in the future, if he fails to hear what she is saying, he is agreeing implicitly with her facetious argument that "what's gone and past/should be past grief," that the assumed loss of Leontes' entire family, that is, of his wife, his son, his daughter, and his dearest friend must be immediately forgotten, only moments after the rupture occurred (3.3.251). Either he can give Paulina free rein to speak with as much "boldness" as she will, to remind him at every turn of his guilt, or he has to agree that mourning his own family is not just unnecessary, but ethically culpable in the same sense that her speech is (3.3.241).

Presented with this impossible choice, between forgetting his dead family and lost friend and accepting culpability for their loss, Leontes chooses the latter course. He ends the scene, no longer condemning Paulina's boldness of speech, but praising it: "Thou didst speak but well/When most thou spok'st the truth" (3.3.257). As Paulina herself earlier formulated, Leontes has come to understand that truth is an abstract good, no matter how it is expressed. Having come to follow her ideological configuration, he ends by literally following her off the stage, and into the affective state that she has constructed: "come, and lead me to these sorrows" (3.3.230). From the violently misogynistic language with which he initially greets her speech, Leontes has been transformed into a man who, more like Benedick than the male characters of Othello, listens to and appreciates the truth that women know.

This, then, is the distinction between how scolding is received in the three plays. In Othello, the female critical voice is so marginalized it cannot even reach the male site of political
and practical power. In Much Ado About Nothing, it is both mocked and celebrated, and ultimately seriously listened to. Finally, in The Winter’s Tale, the female critical voice moves back and forth between both positions—initially silenced, mocked, and threatened, it maneuvers itself into a place of genuine and direct power. In order to understand how scolding, and its reception, operates in these plays in a narratological sense, it is now important to look at the ending of each play, and how it is achieved.

Emilia’s speech is initially heard only by Desdemona—and even then, Desdemona pays little heed to Emilia’s critiques of violent and jealous masculinity. However, like the other two characters, Emilia does eventually create her moment for action. It just comes a little bit, tragically, too late. Immediately after the stage direction indicating Desdemona’s murder, wherein Othello “smothers her,” Emilia begins to call out at the door (5.2.106). She calls out four times, ultimately requesting permission to make the intervention she has been denied for so long: to speak. “O, good my lord, I would speak a word with you,” she says, and then, “I do beseech you/That I may speak with you” (5.2.114, 126). She has entered, not to protect Desdemona, but to bring news of Cassio and Roderigo’s duel, but the language she chooses here still echoes the stigma her speech has brought her throughout the play, as she is careful to seek permission before entering or speaking. Yet her repetition also suggests the urgency to her speech, an urgency that will soon take on its fullest form.

When she has actually entered the scene, and witnessed the spectacle of Desdemona’s murdered body, she at last abandons the pretense of speaking “within door” (as Iago will soon command her to do). Instead, she cries out openly to Desdemona, imploring her again and again
to “speak” (5.4.149). Her focus on Desdemona’s voice as the indicator of her life reinforces the importance of speech as a source of vitality.

Only after Desdemona’s death does Emilia at last introduce a rhetoric of female speech as truth that mirrors Paulina’s in the trial scene. When Othello initially tries to insist that he did not kill Desdemona, Emilia replies, with diction that suggests a surprisingly calm tone, “She said so. I must needs report the truth” (5.2.158). Throughout the scene, as Othello insists on a notion of “falsehood” that seems to conflate the sexual falsehood of infidelity with the notion of lying, Emilia repeatedly overturns this. Desdemona was an “angel,” “heavenly true,” (5.2.162, 166). It is not women, but men, who are “blacker devil”s, who “belie,” who are “rash as fire,” who “may… rot half a grain a day,” who “lies to th’heart” (5.2.161, 163, 165, 190, 191). Even the revelation that it was her own husband, Iago, who accused Desdemona cannot sway her. She is apparently disbelieving at first, repeatedly asking Othello to confirm (thrice, she asks, “my husband?,” an identical line repeating itself to emphasize the depths of her confusion (5.2.170, 179, 181). Yet as soon as she achieves comprehension, she is as ready to accuse her own husband as she was to attack Desdemona’s, or men in general. She consigns Iago to damnation unequivocally.

Nor is she cowed when Iago draws his sword on her to try to silence her. “I care not for thy sword. I’ll make thee known./Though I lost twenty lives,” she tells him, in an act of bravery that seems almost incongruous with her former actions (5.2.200-201). Certainly, it stands in contrast to moments like her initial tepid self-defense, or her cowed willingness to bring Iago the handkerchief for no reason other than “to please his fantasy” (3.3.343). This Emilia seems fearless. Tragically, this Emilia also only appears when it is too late to save Desdemona.
It is not, however, too late to play a critical role in bringing the truth to light. Imagine this scene rewritten without Emilia’s presence. When the various representatives of Venetian society first enter, they are focused exclusively on Othello, who remains convinced of Iago’s good will toward him. It is only Emilia’s intervention, her immediate focus on Iago, that forces the truth out. She begins by pleading with him to deny his deeds, and when he says that he did condemn Desdemona, but truthfully—an assertion that would no doubt stand, Desdemona not being alive to contest it, without Emilia’s presence in the scene—she immediately moves to outright attack upon him: “You told a lie, an odious, damnèd lie!/Upon my soul, a lie, a wicked lie!” (5.2.216-217). There is no room in Emilia’s speech for Iago to work the feats of rhetorical magic that have given him so much power over the other figures in the play. He can only attempt to silence her. In spite of the marginalized place women's speech occupies, it is ultimately his wife's scolding that can stop Iago’s plot.

This suggests, once again, the masculine anxiety surrounding speech in this play and in its historical moment. Iago is a figure of enormous power in the play. He can—through his own verbal prowess—embezzle substantial amounts of money from Roderigo, corrupt the heroic Othello, effect the murder of Desdemona, destabilize the entire Venetian regiment, and get his revenge for the wrongs he imagines against them. He does all this without anyone suspecting him, without encountering much resistance, and without (up to this point) any particular danger to himself. The one thing he cannot do is silence his own wife. Thus, female speech represents an existentially threatening and intractable challenge to male authority.\(^{23}\)

\(^{23}\) However, an interesting route for further exploration might be to consider the way Iago is gendered in the play, since he relies intently on verbal, rather than physical, power.
Iago's inability to silence Emilia becomes increasingly apparent throughout the scene, as he makes repeated attempts to do so. He commands her to be silent: “Go to! Charm your tongue,” to which she replies, “I will not charm my tongue. I am bound to speak” (5.2.219-220). Here, at last, she enters the same rhetorical mode that Paulina occupies from the first—a sense of particular obligation towards speech, of the woman’s scolding voice as the best conduit for a fragile truth. As he tries again to silence her, ordering her home, she actually addresses the apparent impropriety of her speech directly, turning to the other figures of male authority in the room for permission to make herself heard: “Good gentlemen, let me have leave to speak./’Tis proper I obey him, but not now./Perchance, Iago, I will ne’er go home” (5.2.232-235). Just as early modern critics of scolding women feared, Emilia’s powers of speech have destabilized the social order. She is no longer subservient and obedient to her husband.

In fact, when she realizes the role her past obedience had in Desdemona’s death—when she sees how the handkerchief she stole was used as evidence in Iago’s plot against her—she no longer waits for permission from anyone. Iago twice more orders her to be silent and go home, and even draws his sword. Yet she continues to insist on the absolute power of the truth, and on the necessity of her speech. “’Twill out, ’twill out. I peace?/No, I will speak as liberal as the north./ Let heaven and men and devils, let them all,/All, all, cry shame against me, yet I’ll speak” (5.2.260-264). In these lines, from which I have borrowed the title of this paper, Emilia completely rejects the ethic of female speech that was established so early in the play. Unlike Paulina, who is confident in the unique women’s power of speech from the beginning, or Beatrice, who exists in a play-world with a more ambiguous, and even sometimes positive, attitude towards women's speech, Emilia enters to explicit mockery of her voice, and finds no
sources for support among the men of the play, and only limited acceptance from Desdemona. Yet, although all have “cried shame” against her, Emilia centers the absolute importance of telling the truth.

And she does, revealing the critical secret of the handkerchief’s theft, even with Iago’s sword drawn against her. Just before he murders her, as she tells the assembled Venetians her role in his plot, he calls out: “Villainous whore!,” emphasizing one final time the link between women’s ungoverned sexuality and women’s ungovernable speech embedded in the play’s misogyny (5.2.280). This cry of shame, this final attempt to silence her, fails too. Ultimately unable to overpower the force of Emilia’s words with his own, Iago has to turn to violence in order to stop Emilia’s speech.

Yet, even after having been fatally struck, Emilia does not waver. She begs to be placed by Desdemona, reaffirming once again the link between the two women. Her dying words are: “So come my soul to bliss, as I speak true./So speaking as I think, alas, I die” (5.2.299-300). Once again, she claims the power of truth. At last, she implicitly claims for herself the label she so staunchly rejected at the beginning of the play: Emilia is a scold, a woman who speaks as she thinks. In this, she is also a heroic figure.

Unfortunately, she is not heeded by the rest of the characters of the play. In addition to Iago’s outright and violent attempts to silence her, she has spent the entire play in a male-dominated world, where the notion of a woman speaking freely is a source of humor (as it is in her first appearance onstage). Even after her death, after a pair of initial comments by Gratiano focused more on Iago’s killing than on Emilia’s death, she is largely ignored. No one responds to her final speech, or acknowledges her role in bringing the truth to light. The play comes to its
end with no further mention of Emilia’s sacrifice or of her speech, as the characters remaining (all male) focus on extracting a confession from Iago.

The profoundly bleak ending of this play relies on Emilia’s silencing. If she had spoken earlier—that is, if she had been able to speak earlier, if she had operated in a world that listened to her speech instead of condemning it, it would be a different play. In fact, it would be *Much Ado About Nothing*.

It is slightly more challenging to track Beatrice’s interventions in the final plot of *Much Ado About Nothing*, simply because she needs to make so many fewer of them. After her confrontation with Benedick, she is hardly onstage again—in fact, she follows nearly the opposite pattern from Emilia, who takes on an ever-increasing role as the play draws near its conclusion. Beatrice maintains her concern for Hero’s well-being, but she does not need to try to ascertain it. This is clearest in her exchange with Benedick: he has done as she asked, and, furthermore, asks after Hero’s well-being (“How doth your cousin?”) (5.3.89). Nor is Benedick the only man in the play who has taken Beatrice’s, and Hero’s, side—by this point, Leonato and Antonio have issued challenges of their own to Claudio.

In short, Beatrice does not play as active a role in the false-infidelity plot because she does not need to. Her initial profession of Hero’s innocence is heard, and the men in the play, particularly Benedick, are willing to take up her cause at her behest. The play moves smoothly ahead towards a joyful resolution as she is able to focus on her growing love for Benedick, so characteristic of the early modern comedy, and not on the threat to Hero’s life.

The power of words and gender—not so much in a female capacity to speak, but in a male ability to listen—is perhaps most dramatically centered when it appears in both tragic and
comedic modes in the same narrative. *The Winter’s Tale* spans both genres—that is, it starts out, and spends its first three acts on track to become *Othello*, and ends with a resolution that more nearly matches *Much Ado*.

The nature of this genre transformation becomes apparent when we next see Leontes and Paulina after their confrontation, and Paulina’s manipulation, in the courthouse. Famously, the play "slides o'er sixteen years," and we do not see either character again for a full act (4.1.15). We are plunged into the comedic, pastoral, and cheerful world of Bohemia, where the plot and genre transform from the serious, pre-tragic drama of the first three acts into a strictly comedic setting. The young lovers in the pastoral setting are kept apart by the father who cannot recognize the purity of their connection, identities are mistaken, and lovable clowns and charming rogues fill out the background. It is somewhat jarring for the audience, then, to be back in Sicily, in a situation not so apparently different than the one we just left—Paulina and Leontes are talking, surrounded by courtiers.

Yet Leontes' transformation has continued, even been completed, in the time he has been off-stage. He echoes now the rhetoric Paulina closed her last speech on: "Whilst I remember/Her and her virtues, I cannot forget/My blemishes in them”—that is, he has come not just to accept, but to internalize and repeat, Paulina’s rhetoric, that he cannot forgive himself without also forgetting Hermione (5.1.7-9). And though it is Leontes that says this, Paulina is there to reinforce the message ("True, too true") and to deepen its sting (5.1.13). She refers endlessly to Hermione's unmatched quality as a woman and a wife, and to Leontes' fault for her death: "she you killed/would be unparalleled" (5.1.18-19). Leontes' response to this formulation reveals the
depth of his grief, and particularly of his guilt, as he both accepts the truth of Paulina's accusation and struggles against the pain it causes him. "She I killed? I did so, but thou strik'st me Sorely to say I did. It is as bitter/Upon thy tongue as in my thought. Now, good now, Say so but seldom," he asks—no longer rejecting her criticisms of him, but ending with a plea that she will accuse him of killing his wife "but seldom," so he need only sometimes be reminded of it (5.1.17-22). The significance of these lines is palpable. He accepts the reality of what he has done, and even the necessity of being sometimes reminded of it. He asks only to be spared too-frequent reminders, and the guilt and anguish they will necessarily bring him.

Leontes also creates a direct line, in his dialogue, between Paulina’s “tongue” and his own “thought” (5.1.18). Initially, her speech, and the female tongue as the symbol of it, was reviled. Now Leontes acknowledges the direct power it has to shape his thoughts. Paulina is in a position of near-absolute power here: Leontes may still be the king, but it is Paulina, through her speech, who can control how he thinks and feels. He can act, but she gives meaning to his actions with her words.

The reactions of others onstage to Paulina in this scene are likewise revelatory toward the play's attitude towards women's speech. Once again, the onlookers try to quiet Paulina, but instead of directly telling her, as earlier in the play, that she is behaving in a disrespectful manner, the criticisms are given hesitantly and flatteringly. Cleomoenes, for instance, feels the need to expand on Leontes' plea, asking Paulina to bring up Hermione's murder "Not at all, good lady./You might have spoken a thousand things that would/Have done the time more benefit and graced/Your kindness better" (5.1.24-29). She is no longer too bold or too rash. Now she is
graceful and kind. Courtiers must flatter her, attempt to manipulate her through speech, instead of the reverse.

Cleomenes’ speech, though, is much less skillful than Paulina’s. Rather than retreat, as Paulina does in the face of very similar, but more forcefully phrased, critiques in Act 3, she pivots to the political. She does not respond to the idea that she might be wrong to essentially publicly accuse the king of murder, causing him substantial and visible distress, but begins debating whether or not Leontes should marry again with Cleomenes and Dion. This is not a personal matter, but a question of state, and Paulina’s opinion on it seems to be central to how it will be enacted.

Leontes' reaction is what has truly changed. He does not respond directly to either of his male lords, addressing only Paulina. "Good Paulina,/Who hast the memory of Hermione,/I know, in honor, O, that ever I/Had squared me to thy counsel!" (5.1.58-63). Through her proximity to Hermione, Paulina has earned a place of notable emotional and political sway over the king. He refers to her throughout the scene as his "Good Paulina" and "True Paulina," showing the significance he places on both the ethics and veracity of her speech. More significant still is the political role she has come to play in this court. In a social milieu where women's words are demonized, condemned, and even outlawed, Leontes has come to see Paulina's speech, not as scolding or shrewishness, but as "counsel," a word which suggests she has come to be seen as an official advisor to the king (5.1.63).

Over the objections of the rest of the court, Paulina extracts from Leontes an oath "never to marry but by [Paulina's] free leave" (5.1.85-86.) Intriguingly, this follows on Leontes' statement, not that he intends to marry soon, but that he will never marry anyone again—
Paulina’s oath seems to confine him to celibacy, but it will actually soon serve to bind him in an obligation to renew his marriage to the revived Hermione. Paulina calls the watching lords to "bear witness to this oath," which they both object to (5.1.89). Paulina and Leontes both ignore these objections, as Loentes promises Paulina that "we shall not marry till thou bid’st us" (5.1.103).

Again, I wish to draw attention to the profoundly unusual degree of power Paulina has over the king here, a power which consists--as Paulina herself has acknowledged throughout the play--in the ability she has to speak with persuasive power. Some of the most important political issues in the Sicilian kingdom, such as the king's marriage, his happiness, and above all, the succession, lie in the power of Paulina's speech. Through her verbal dexterity, she has constituted this state of power for herself, in her initial appeals for Hermione, in her remarkable accusations of Leontes after her apparent death, and in her careful manipulation of Leontes into this oath.

With words, she has gained power over him--a power that has its ultimate manifestation in the words he speaks, the promise never to marry without her consent. His use of the royal “we” here reminds the audience that he is still the king, still in the ultimate position of political power (5.1.103). Yet he yields a substantial measure of that power to Paulina, giving her the ability to decide, for him and for Sicilia, what the future will hold.

And at the end of the play, Paulina seems to have mastered the ultimate power--over life and death itself. She becomes a sort of theatrical director. Hermione's "statue" is onstage at a setting of Paulina's choosing, under her control, behind curtains that she raises and draws at her own will. According to a script of her own authorship, she coaxes Leontes, along with Polixenes, Florizel, and Perdita, into an appropriate state of credulity and wonderment. She extracts from
them the necessary promises--for instance, that they will not accuse her of being "assisted by wicked powers," a realistic fear for an early modern woman performing an apparently supernatural feat (5.3.112). In short, she has created the position of ultimate power for herself within the theatrical space where she exists. She is the figure of authority, the director herself.

Leontes acknowledges this, saying, "What you can make her do/I am content to look on; what to speak,/I am content to hear," further ceding any power he may retain in this scenario to Paulina (5.3.113-116). Without her intervention, supernatural or otherwise, there can be no revival, and so he—and all those present—yield Paulina what she demands. In this moment, when Paulina has her position entirely reversed from the powerless, accused, and threatened figure she was in Act 3, the tragedy of the play reverses too. At Paulina's instructions, the statue Hermione awakes, descends, takes Leontes by the hand, and blesses her daughter Perdita. Yet without Paulina's speech, and without the shift in how the powerful men of the play react to it, none of this would be possible.
Conclusion: Contemporary Echoes

In these three plays, with their three very different endings to the same story, we see Shakespeare repeatedly work through the question of what is to be done with the power of women's speech. In each of these plays, the female voice represents a potentially dangerous and destabilizing force. It confronts male power at the source, often in threateningly direct ways. And it is treated as the threat that it is, with sometimes-violent attempts made to silence and control it. Though the speaking women in each play are distinct characters, each with her own relationship to her speech and to the world that attempts to control it, they serve similar narratological roles. It is not what the characters do differently, but how they are treated differently, that shapes the fate of the play-world.

In Othello, the female voice is effectively silenced, and the play ends in tragedy. Admittedly, Emilia begins her attempts at speaking later than her counterparts in the other plays, but she also has some of the most assertive and profound dialogue of any character. It is not her
failure to speak, but the failure of men to listen, that dooms the play to its status as a “failed comedy” (McEachern 129). Emilia’s tragedy offers a cutting critique of the treatment of women’s voices in its era—and in our own. The ending asks us what might have been possible if only we had listened.

In *Much Ado About Nothing*, the female voice is embraced, and the play achieves a comedic, happy ending. The male attempts to silence and minimize the female voice are less violent and less frequent, and, critically, they are counterbalanced with moments of respect for female speech that can undo the former mode of communication. Although the play veers towards tragedy with the devastation of Hero and Claudio’s first, failed wedding, comedy is restored through the intervention of Beatrice’s voice. Not just because she speaks, but because she is heard, the play’s plunge towards tragedy is averted, and a happy ending restored.

In *The Winter's Tale*, we see the most complex relationship between genre, gender, and voice, as the treatment of Paulina’s speech evolves with the genre of the play, from silenced and tragic into embraced and comic. She begins in perhaps the most marginalized position, with the most explicit attacks against her speech. Yet she also has the most confidence in her own speech to transform the world around her, asserting from the beginning that it is a particular, female, form of power. Though initially she is ignored and threatened, she manages to gain the audience that Beatrice has and Emilia lacks—an audience of male figures of authority. In doing so, she changes the play from tragedy to comedy. In a sense, her ability to speak—and Leontes’, even belated, willingness to listen—literally brings Hermione back from the dead, changing the tragic ending of loss into the comedic ending of marriage, love, and new beginnings.
While *Othello* is a failed comedy, and *Much Ado About Nothing* a comedy that veers dangerously towards tragedy, *The Winter’s Tale* fully inhabits first the tragic, then the comedic, genres. Its pivot between the two is marked with the play’s lapse of time, with a change in setting, and with a complete shift in tone. This puts additional emphasis on the power of listening to women’s voices. The distinction can do more than just change the tone of the play—it can recreate the very world in which the play takes place, changing it on the fundamental level of genre itself.

The contrast between these three plays goes beyond the often-observed maxim that women are empowered in comedy, disempowered in tragedy. Many critics have identified this dynamic. For instance, Linda Barber in *Comic Women, Tragic Men: Gender and Genre in Shakespeare* states outright that “the feminine… is Shakespeare’s natural ally in the mode of festive comedy” (41). In the tragedies, it is men who “make judgments of the women” (26). In comedy women are active, in tragedy they are passive. Perhaps this is even the reason why comedy is comedic, and tragedy is tragic.

But, in a close reading of how women’s speech functions in these plays, it becomes clear that it is not the women who change. Yes, Emilia waits longer to speak than do Paulina or Beatrice, but speak she eventually does. Arguably, she offers a serious critique of her play-world’s male violence sooner and more completely and convincingly than Beatrice does. The dividing line between tragedy and comedy is not in women’s ability to speak, but in men’s ability to listen to them.

This reveals, embedded within these plays, a lesson for our era, in which the extent of sexual harassment and abuse against women is just beginning to come to light. As countless
writers have indicated, it is not true that women only began to speak about sexual violence when it became a hashtag. Indeed, women have spoken their truths for many years. This fact is cemented by the presence of the female voice in these four-century-old plays. In life, as in the plays, these voices have often met with disbelief, condemnation, and silencing.

I write this in a moment of both political turmoil and profound hope. As a concerted effort to diminish women’s legal and political rights takes shape in the public sphere, there are voices that speak against this, as boldly and rashly as Paulina’s, with the wit and love of Beatrice, with the bravery that Emilia possesses at the end. The rise of movements like #metoo, of women speaking out about sexual violence, of the rejection of millennia of discourse critiquing women’s speech and demanding our silence, suggests that the tipping point of gender and discourse at which we find ourselves might fall away from tragedy and into comedy.

Yet a close reading of these plays also forces us to reckon with where the true difference between these modes lies: and it is not in women’s voices. For, just as patriarchal anxieties fear, women’s voices can never be entirely silenced, even in the most expressly misogynistic of contexts. It is not women who have to learn to speak, for they have done so, and continue to do so. What these three characters, and their refusal to be obediently silent, reveal is the difference in how those voices are treated. These three plays, taken together, center the importance, not just of women speaking out, but of men learning to listen, if we want to live in a world that can offer joyful endings.
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