

## “Women and the Ethics of Speaking in Shakespeare”

Cristina León Alfar  
Hunter College, CUNY  
Department of English  
New York, NY 10065  
@cristinalalfar.bsky.social

What does it mean to speak? How do we define speaking? Must speaking effect change? Or can speaking have action even if it does not change a play's outcome? What counts as change or as effect? In this essay, I want to think about these questions in several of Shakespeare's plays where women speak passionately in anger, despair, and grief. They speak curses, complaints, laments, truths, and lies. Most of their speeches have no effect on the final action of the play they are in. They die, or walk away powerless, or are forced to marry. But as I have argued previously, their words are indelibly marked in our brains as we close our text or leave the theater. They have, in other words, dramatic and theatrical effect. This essay will address speeches made by Tamora in *Titus Andronicus*, Margaret in *Richard III*, Isabella in *Measure for Measure*, and Emilia in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* to argue that women characters in the drama become parrhesiasts, speaking truth to power as a right of all citizens, speaking, in fact, from an ethical center that points to corruptions, tyrannies, and systems of inequity at work in their particular plays. Driven by the power of men over women, feminist forms of parrhesia call attention to structural inequities to which women are subject and by which they become vulnerable. Such inequities are not limited merely to gender, but also emerge from inequities of nation and sexuality. There is a theatrical division, then, between the masculinist action staged in the plays, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the ethical, dramatic (that is theatrical), and hermeneutic effects produced by women's rejection of corrupt and violent masculinist state power. Speaking out, speaking truth to power, female characters establish a form of feminist ethics that demands that we reframe their texts. They demand that we, as scholars, center what has been marginal. My reading aims to open meaning, to rework interpretation, alter the questions we ask and the arguments we make about women and speaking in Shakespeare.

Some influential authors/works.

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Foucault, Michel. *The Government of Self and Others: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1982-1983*. Edited by Frédéric Gros et al., Translated by Graham Burchell, Palgrave, 2010. Springer Link, <http://link.springer.com/10.1057/9780230274730>.

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## Killing with Kindness: Affectionate Language and Domestic Tragedy

When it comes to analysing terms of endearment in Shakespeare's plays, much of the process depends on carefully noting the status of characters, their relationship to one another, and the context in which they are speaking. However, an actor's delivery of an endearment, his or her counterpart's reaction to that delivery, as well as a director's staging also impacts the intended meaning of such intimate language. How, for example, does an actor playing Othello interpret his use of endearments towards Desdemona after Iago has persuaded him that she is unfaithful? Does he deliver the forms of address with sincere affection? Dissembling intimacy? Bitterness? This paper considers the nuanced nature of endearments in domestic tragedies from the perspective of performance, and argues that the manner in which these affectionate vocatives are spoken has significant consequence for understanding the breakdown of the central marital relationship as well as the dramatic function of intimacy within the genre of tragedy.

### References:

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**James Kuzner**  
**“*King Lear* and the Irony of Capacity”**

**Abstract**

This paper considers the relation between lyric utterance, dramatic irony, and intellectual disability in *King Lear*, particularly in Lear’s famous address to Cordelia—which begins with “Come, let’s away”—just before Edmund sends both to prison. Reading “Come, let’s away” alongside early modern prison literature, I argue that the speech’s work as lyric within tragic drama erodes dramatic irony, removing the audience from the superior knowledge position that such irony affords and that enables ableist perspectives to begin with. In shifting attention from tragic action (from ‘what happens next’) to lyric power (to ‘what happens now’), Lear’s speech renders the ability and willingness to understand one’s situation, and to act efficaciously in that situation, irrelevant to accessing what is beautiful and true. In this, Shakespeare separates the question of mental capacity from that of felicitous choice. The irony of capacity in “Come, let’s away,” then, is this: that when I focus on the value of mental capacity and on the power over action that Lear lacks, I miss what his speech does, the lyric capacity that it has.

**References:**

- Jonathan Culler, “Why Lyric?,” *PMLA* 123.1 (2008): 201-206.  
T.S. Eliot, “The Three Voices of Poetry,” in *The Lyric Theory Reader*, ed. Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014).

**Scott Oldenburg**  
**“Shakespeare’s Dysfluency Sonnets”**

This paper examines the trope of tongue-tiedness in Shakespeare’s sonnets. While tongue tied at times functioned as a sign of overwhelming emotion or ineffability, it was first understood as a condition known as *ankyloglossia*, whereby the lingual frenulum interferes with pronunciation, and from this came a generalized use of the term to refer to stammering and other dysfluencies as well as the uses that simply indicate silence. Sonnet 85’s description of the experience of being tongue-tied, however, emphasizes that “words come hind-most,” not absent or mispronounced or buried by emotion, but delayed as though by a glottal block or a repeated syllable and other sonnets suggest no lack of words; only a lack of time needed to fully articulate them. Sonnets 23, 80, 102 and others explore dysfluency against a backdrop of hyperfluency on the stage and in sonnets themselves. Dysfluency becomes a way of instigating intimacy through a display of vulnerability. As such dysfluency in the sonnets defies strict hierarchies of fluent and dyfluent as well as patron and client, master and servant.

**References:**

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Joshua St. Pierre, *Cheap Talk: Disability and the Politics of Communication* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2022).