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**“Who taught thee rhetoric to deceive a maid?": Gendered
Speech Conventions and Male-Female Power Relations in
*Venus and Adonis, The Rape of Lucrece and Hero and
Leander*”**

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English Dissertation

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Introduction

During the 1590s, William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe led a revival of the epyllion. This poetic form was distinctive for its 'highly figured erotic description', narrative length and third-person voice – features that enabled a focus on dialogue unavailable through the sonnet form.¹ This dissertation will analyse how direct and indirect speech are used to construct the male-female power relations of three epyllia.

A term coined in the nineteenth century, the epyllion originated in the classical era as a short narrative poem written in dactylic hexameters. In the early modern period, the form altered in metre and style but retained the focus on carnal desire distinct to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which themselves are considered 'a series of epyllia worked together'.² Among the most popular epyllia were *Venus and Adonis* (VA, 1593) and *The Rape of Lucrece* (RL, 1594), which were dedicated to Henry Wriothesley and circulated widely in print; their reputation is evident in Francis Meres' praise of Shakespeare, which opens with reference to his epyllia: 'The witty soul of Ovid lives in mellifluous & honey-tongued Shakespeare, witness his Venus and Adonis, his Lucrece'.³ Before 1640, the poems survived in sixteen and eight editions respectively, and were accompanied in their success by the 'wide circulation and popularity' of *Hero and Leander* (HL), first published in 1598.⁴ Beyond the epyllion's reach to both courtly and commercial audiences, the centralisation of a heterosexual love interest makes the form

¹ 'EPYLLION' and 'NARRATIVE POETRY', in *The New Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics*,

<https://www.proquest.com/docview/2137921207/913E0EC432354CF7PQ/1?accountid=8018> [accessed 01 December 2020].

² Ibid.

³ Francis Meres, *Palladis Tamia* (London: printed by P. Short, 1598). EEBO

<https://www.proquest.com/eebo/docview/2264196200/51EC85413CD54DD8PQ/2?accountid=8018> [accessed 01 December 2020].

⁴ Colin Burrow, 'Introduction', in *The Complete Sonnets and Poems*, ed. by Colin Burrow and Stanley Wells (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p.43; András Kiséry, 'The Early Success of Hero and Leander', in *Christopher Marlowe, Theatrical Commerce, and the Book Trade*, ed. by Kirk Melnikoff and Roslyn Knutson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), p.116.

a valuable arena for examining the literary representation of gendered power hierarchies in the 1590s.⁵

Jane Donawerth’s observation that ‘with almost no financial or political power, women needed the resources of persuasion’ highlights both the powerlessness of the sixteenth-century woman and her reliance on the spoken word.⁶ I will analyse how early modern expectations for men and women’s verbal expression – herein defined as ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ speech – are observed in *VA*, *RL* and *HL*. Crucially, rather than supporting these norms, Shakespeare and Marlowe’s adherence to them facilitates the challenging of social convention. In *VA* and *RL*, Shakespeare highlights both the limiting effects of ‘feminine’ speech on the expression of consent and the injustice of defining rhetoric as exclusive to males. Contrastingly, Marlowe exploits the epyllion’s focus on physical action in order to probe the power of rhetoric in a culture where male will had guaranteed fulfilment.

Margaret King comments that ‘humanism, the major intellectual movement of the [...] Renaissance, was dominated by men and interested in themes of interest to man’.⁷ This is upheld where the gendered speech conventions followed in by Shakespeare and Marlowe facilitate the clear expression of male characters and the silencing or dismissal of female characters. However, in *VA*, *RL* and *HL*, the epyllion form facilitates the questioning of these conventions, suggesting that a degree of doubt existed around the culture of masculine authority in mixed-gender verbal interactions.

⁵ ‘EPYLLION’, in *The New Princeton Encyclopaedia*.

⁶ Jane Donawerth, ‘The Politics of Renaissance Rhetorical Theory by Women’, in *Political Rhetoric, Power, and Renaissance Women*, ed. by Carole Levin and Patricia Sullivan (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), p.264.

⁷ Margaret King ‘Women’s Voices, the Early Modern, and the Civilization of the West’, *Shakespeare Studies*, 25 (1997), 21-31 (p.28).

CHAPTER 1

'With her own white fleece her voice controlled': Shakespeare and Marlowe's Response to Early Modern Expectations for Women's Speech

'The Tongue is the only Weapon Women have to defend themselves with, and they had need to use it dextrously'.⁸

The seventeenth-century educator Bathusa Makin described the spoken word as the definitive mode of expression and self-assertion for the early modern woman. However, the research of K.L. Sandy-Smith, Ann Jones and Barbara Baines illuminates how female voices were limited in the social settings, sexual politics and literature of this time. This presents a paradox in which a woman's 'only weapon' was taken from her by expectations for humility or silence. This chapter will elucidate how cultural parameters for women's speech permeate the narratives of *RL* and *HL*, resulting in an ambiguous discourse of 'unspoken' consent. Crucially, Shakespeare departs from social convention in *RL* by emphasising the impact of 'feminine' speech tropes on Lucrece's ability to articulate her perspective.

Countering King's assumption that the early modern period marked 'the clear articulation, for the first time in history and anywhere on the globe, of women's voices', historical studies show that female expression was confined to socially acceptable criterion.⁹ Wendy Wall observes how 'women were specifically discouraged from tapping into the newly popular channel of print', with Sandy-Smith adding that the few women

⁸ Bathusa Makin, *An Essay to Revive the Antient Education of Gentlewomen* (London: printed by J.D., 1673). *Oxford Text Archive*

<https://ota.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/repository/xmlui/handle/20.500.12024/A51611> [accessed 19 February 2021].

⁹ King, p.21.

‘accepted’ into print culture ‘adhered to the genres of so-called “women’s” writing’.¹⁰ These genres – including ‘mother’s advice, translation, or polemic/divine inspiration literature’ – created boundaries for women’s subject matter.¹¹ In addition, social expectations for ‘female writers’ humility’ often reduced the stylistic directness and clarity of their literature.¹² This is exemplified in Æmilia Lanyer’s dedications of *Salve Deus Rex Iudæorum* to Queen Elizabeth: ‘Reade it faire Queene, though it defectiue be’, and the Countess of Dorset: ‘Blest by our Sauiors merits, not my skil’.¹³ This ‘self-effacing language’ ensured that the female writer’s perspective was muted through style, as well as genre.¹⁴

Just as the content and tone of women’s writing was aligned with humility and domesticity, their verbal expression was also expected to reflect ‘desirable’ female traits. Jones’ assertion that ‘female silence was equated with chastity, female eloquence with promiscuity’ highlights how the extent of a woman’s speech was viewed to indicate her moral behaviour and reputation.¹⁵ Shakespeare and Marlowe show an acute awareness of the ‘feminine’ speech qualities outlined thus far in the chapter; however, they explore the consequences of these conventions to differing extents.

In *HL*, the argument of the first sestiad – an addition by George Chapman in 1598 – foregrounds an authorial presence in ‘which tale the author doth imply’.¹⁶ The verb ‘imply’ carries both the meanings ‘to involve the truth or existence of’ and ‘to

¹⁰ Wendy Wall, *Authorship and Publication in the English Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), p.280; K.L. Sandy-Smith, ‘Early Modern Women Writers and Humility as Rhetoric’ (Unpublished Master’s Thesis, University of Dayton, 2013), p.3.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Sandy-Smith, p.3.

¹³ Æmilia Lanyer, *Salve Deus Rex Iudæorum* (London: printed by Valentine Simmes, 1611), ll.5,9-10. *EEBO* <<http://www.luminarium.org/renascence-editions/lanyer1.html>> [accessed 17 February 2021].

¹⁴ Sandy-Smith, p.2.

¹⁵ Ann Rosalind Jones, *The Currency of Eros* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), p.1.

¹⁶ Christopher Marlowe, ‘Hero and Leander’, in *The Complete Poems and Translations*, ed. by Stephen Orgel (New York: Penguin, 2007), 1.11.6. Subsequent references in text (sestiad.line.x).

enfold, enwrap, entangle'.¹⁷ This polysemy highlights how *HL* is both communicated by Marlowe and shaped by his perspective as a sixteenth-century Englishman; indeed, early modern expectations for gendered speech inflect his characterisation of Hero. For instance, Hero's initial dialogue, "Were I the saint he worships, I would hear him," (1.I.179), uses the subjunctive mood to present a hypothetical situation and avoid negation. This instance of feminine humility and indirectness detracts from the force of her rejection. Additionally, Hero's direct speech is notably less extensive than Leander's. This is evident where Marlowe features two rhetorical passages for Leander, which are ninety-six and forty-two lines respectively. Between these passages, Hero responds with two words:

"To Venus," answered she, and as she spake, Forth
from those two tralucent cisterns brake A stream of
liquid pearl, which down her face Made milk-white
paths, whereon the gods might trace (1.II.295-8)

Here, Hero's dialogue is replaced by a detailed portrayal of her tears. This visually ekphrastic passage overwhelms her brief expression of loyalty to Venus and thus her commitment to chastity. Hero's minimal direct speech reflects the early modern value of female silence equating to female chastity, which is furthered by the imagery of white in this passage. Marlowe's focus on details of colour – 'tralucent', 'pearl', 'milk-white' – also draws attention to Hero's beauty and desirability, rather than her distress over Leander's pressuring of her. Thus, by depicting Hero through the male gaze and reducing instances of her direct speech, Marlowe diminishes the impact of her consent.

Hero's clarity is further reduced through indirect speech. In the rhyming couplet 'Thereat she smiled, and did deny him so,/ As put thereby, yet might he hope for mo'

¹⁷ OED Online, <<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/191722?redirectedFrom=strive#eid>> [accessed 09 April 2021]. 'Imply', v., senses 1, 2.a.

(1.II.311-2), the nature of Hero's denial is never disclosed, creating ambiguity. As monosyllables place the two end-rhyming clauses in parallel, the corresponding verbs 'deny' and 'hope' suggest that Hero's rejection of Leander is not final – an implication furthered by the modal verb 'might'. Moreover, in 'Hero's looks yielded, but her words made war;! Women are won when they begin to jar.' (1.II.331-2), the eye-rhymed 'war' and 'jar' present Hero's rejection as a metaphorical battle to be overcome. The parallel syntax of 'her looks yielded' and 'her words made war', along with the co-ordinating conjunction 'but' places equal emphasis on spoken consent and 'implied' consent communicated through expressions and gestures. Marlowe therefore cultivates a language of consent that is both nonoral and expressed through denial, hindering Hero's ability to effectively vocalise her will.

'Unspoken' consent is also explored in *RL*. However, Shakespeare goes further to probe the social causes and consequences of this convention, focalising how 'feminine' speech expectations contribute to Lucrece's tragedy. Colin Burrow notes that while *RL* 'was often briefly cited [...] as an example of feminine virtue [...] most post-classical interpreters of her story were also aware of St Augustine's critical treatment of it'.¹⁸ In *The City of God* (AD 426), Augustine suggests that Lucrece's suicide indicates that she was 'priuy to her owne sinne': 'if the murder be extenuated, the adultery is confirmed'.¹⁹ His argument concludes that the victim's death could only be justified by her 'secret consent'.²⁰

Shakespeare engages with Augustine's argument through the remark of Brutus: 'Thy wretched wife mistook the matter so,! To slay herself that should have slain her foe.' (II.1826-7). While Brutus' comment appears to point to the injustice of Lucrece's suffering, Shakespeare may also be employing the rhetorical device of innuendo to imply

¹⁸ Burrow, p.45.

¹⁹ St Augustine, *Of The Citie of God* (London: printed by George Eld, 1610).

EEBO<<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A22641.0001.001/1:8.19?rgn=div2;view=fulltext>> [accessed 17 February 2021]

²⁰ Ibid.

that her self-inflicted punishment proves her guilt. Moreover, in Tarquin's couplet 'Thy never-conquered fort: the fault is thine,/ For those thine eyes betray thee unto mine' (ll.482-3), the end-rhyming of 'thine' and 'mine' depicts a balance of pronouns and thus responsibility, appealing to Augustine's assertion that 'both were guilty of it'.²¹ The verb 'betray' also implies Lucrece's agency in the rape, which is furthered in her admission to Collatine: 'Yet I am guilty of thy honour's wrack' (l.841), and the narrator's aphorism: 'but they whose guilt within their bosoms lie/ Imagine every eye beholds their blame' (ll.1342-3). Although these comments seem to emphasise Lucrece's responsibility, Shakespeare's repeated use of legalistic diction in 'guilt' and his focus on Collatine's 'honour' emphasises the role of institutions and traditions in promoting this outlook. Indeed, in a study of 'the effacement of rape' in early modern 'legal and literary texts', Baines notes that 'the law's increasing reliance upon the concept of consent during the Renaissance resulted in a tendency to avoid the reality of rape altogether'.²² With this in mind, Shakespeare challenges convention by highlighting how an Augustinian interpretation of Lucrece is rooted in constructed social norms.

The limiting effects of early modern 'feminine' language traits are more overtly criticised where Shakespeare stresses Lucrece's clear lack of consent. Lucrece is introduced to the reader through a conflict of symbols – that of virtuous white and the red of blushes: 'when shame assailed, the red should fence the white' – simultaneously fulfilling the ideals of chastity and humility.²³ This demure image is juxtaposed by the image of a fight evoked in 'fence', which Shakespeare develops into a conceit:

²¹ Ibid.

²² Barbara J. Baines, 'Effacing Rape in Early Modern Representation', *ELH*, 65:1 (1998), 69-98 (pp.69, 75).

²³ William Shakespeare, 'The Rape of Lucrece', in *The Complete Sonnets and Poems*, ed. by Colin Burrow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), l.64. Subsequent references in text (line.x).

This silent war of lilies and of roses
Which Tarquin viewed in her fair face's field,
In their pure ranks his traitor eye encloses (ll.71-3)

Here, the oxymoron 'silent war' anticipates a tension between the expected feminine quality of humility and Lucrece's resoluteness against Tarquin's advances. This is furthered where the fricative alliteration of 'fair face's field' plays on the polysemy of a field of flowers – implying feminine tenderness – and a battlefield. Lucrece's definite response to Tarquin is emphasised structurally where a long rhetorical passage of direct speech (ll.575-644, 652-66) is prefaced by a section of indirect speech that reinforces her verbal message (ll.544-74). While direct and indirect speech work together to deliver Lucrece's clear rejection of Tarquin, Shakespeare points to the failure of her speech not – as with Hero – in the clarity of her expression, but in the cultural treatment of consent. For instance, in the couplet, 'Like a white hind under the gripe's sharp claws, / Pleads in a wilderness where are no laws,' (ll.543-4), the masculine end-rhyming of 'claws' and 'laws' juxtaposes the concepts of order and lawlessness. This depicts a carnal, instinctive environment in which consent is worthless. Moreover, the simile portrays a predator-prey relationship, aligning Lucrece's loss of physical power in the animal kingdom with her disregarded voice as a woman in society.

Shakespeare revisits the predator-prey motif throughout *RL*, casting the physical and verbal power imbalance between Lucrece and Tarquin in a dangerous, uncivilised light. During Lucrece's rape, Shakespeare omits direct speech entirely, furthering the deterioration into animal code:

The wolf hath seized his prey; the poor lamb cries, Till
with her own white fleece her voice controlled Entombs
her outcry in her lips' sweet fold. (ll.677-9)

The lamb carries connotations of purity, gentleness and helplessness, mirroring the traits of the ideal early modern woman as outlined by Sandy-Smith and Jones. Interestingly, the possessive pronoun 'her', followed by the adjective 'own', depicts Lucrece as smothered by her identity as a lamb, and thus by the social expectation for her silence and verbal passivity. Animalistic imagery therefore physicalises the damage inflicted by early modern standards for women's speech, foregrounding Lucrece's inability to adequately express her lack of consent.

Shakespeare's criticism of early modern gendered speech conventions pushes against the legal and social traditions of the time. In 1555 and 1597, statutes distinguished between the crimes of kidnapping and rape – a discrepancy that was absent in medieval law. Baines observes that these new laws 'contributed to a shift in the way rape was perceived: no longer as a crime against property but as a crime against the person'.²⁴ However, despite this institutional change, 'the percentage of convictions' of rape remained 'very rare', highlighting a sustained disregard for female consent.²⁵ In contrast, Shakespeare's critical engagement with Augustine's *The City of God* and use of animalistic imagery demonstrates a concern with the cultural silencing of women. Thus, while Shakespeare and Marlowe both acknowledge the ambiguity that comes with 'feminine' speech traits, Shakespeare goes further to focalise the violation of consent – and the wider power imbalance – that develops as a result.

²⁴ Baines, p.72.

²⁵ Ibid.

CHAPTER 2

'Look how he can, she cannot choose but love': The Disproportionate Power of Male Expression in *The Rape of Lucrece* and *Venus and Adonis*

Chapter 1 explored Shakespeare and Marlowe's adherence to early modern expectations for women's speech and the resultant limitations on Lucrece's ability to consent.

Shakespeare furthers his comment on the impact of gendered speech conventions via the 'masculine' voice. Through his interaction with both the dialogue of male characters and the speech styles deemed exclusive to men, Shakespeare once again follows early modern standards of 'masculine' and 'feminine' expression whilst exploring the detrimental effects of these standards on the female experience.

Although Shakespeare's main emphasis in *RL* is Lucrece's clearly vocalised, yet overlooked consent, the concept of consent is introduced through an alternative set of voices in the Argument: 'the people were so moved that, with one consent [...] the state government changed from kings to consuls.' (Argument, ll.40-3). Here, the verb 'consent' carries ultimate power and authority, with the voice of the 'people' changing the shape of Roman governance. Shakespeare therefore juxtaposes the power of a collective expression of consent within the 'masculine' arena of politics with Lucrece's disregarded consent.

The disproportionate power of the male voice is furthered where Collatine serves as the catalyst for Lucrece's rape: 'When Collatine unwisely did not let/ To praise the clear unmatched red and white' (ll.10-11). Collatine's bragging is depicted entirely through indirect speech; yet, despite this abstraction, his words nonetheless trigger the events of the poem. Shakespeare therefore highlights the influence of Collatine's speech on both Lucrece's tragedy and the external structure of the epyllion, with his boast acting as a major narrative turning point. In this light, Lucrece's aforementioned admission, 'yet I am guilty of thy honour's wrack' (l.841) plays on the polysemy of 'wrack' as both 'damage,

disaster, or injury to a person, state, etc.’ and the now-obsolete meaning of ‘retributive punishment’.²⁶ Collatine’s pride is both damaged by and the guilty perpetrator of Lucrece’s rape. In this light, Collatine’s boast and the introduction of consent in the Argument depict the male voice as significantly more impactful than the female voice in *RL*, with the diminished weight of Lucrece’s pleas encouraging a sense of injustice.

In *VA*, Shakespeare once again addresses the concepts of consent and indirect speech, this time emphasising the authority of Adonis even as he takes on ‘feminine’ language traits. In this epyllion, traditional Petrarchan gender roles are inverted, with Venus pursuing the unrequited love of Adonis. The poem’s main source text is from Book X of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, with Richard Rambuss arguing that ‘Adonis’ wilful, resolute disdain for love – or, more precisely for Venus – is Shakespeare’s principal revision of the Ovidian original’.²⁷ Indeed, in Ovid’s rendition of the tale, Adonis is passive and at times accepting of Venus’ advances – for instance as Venus prepares to tell the story of Atlanta: “‘Here I would wish to rest with you’/ [...] And him she lay, her head upon his breast’.²⁸ Burrow asserts that the Ovidian Adonis’ ‘silence and subordination to Venus become in Shakespeare’s retelling of the tale fraught with significance’.²⁹ However contradicting Burrow’s suggestion of subordination, Shakespeare’s Adonis maintains a degree of dominance where, despite having only 88 lines of direct speech, his spoken consent is clearly observed. This is evident in the chiasmus of line four: ‘Hunting he loved, but love he laughed to scorn’, with the active verbs ‘laughed’ and ‘scorn’ presenting Adonis as a patronising character, contrasting the desperate pleas of Lucrece.³⁰ Moreover, in ‘Look how he can, she cannot choose but love’ (l.79), the

²⁶ OED, ‘wrack’, n., senses 1.a., 2.a.

²⁷ Richard Rambuss, ‘Shakespeare’s Venus and Adonis’, in *A Companion to Shakespeare’s Works*, ed. by Richard Dutton and Jean Howard (Malden: Blackwell, 2003), p.241.

²⁸ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. by A.D. Melville (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), X.556-8.

²⁹ Burrow, p.23.

³⁰ William Shakespeare, ‘Venus and Adonis’, in *The Complete Sonnets and Poems*, ed. by Colin Burrow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), l.4. Subsequent references in text (line.x).

paralleled verb phrases ‘he can’ and ‘she cannot’ highlight both Adonis’s ability to define consent and his position of control over Venus.

Adonis’s superiority is furthered in the rare instances of his direct speech, which feature imperatives including “Dismiss your vows, your feignèd tears, your flatt’ry” (l.425). Here, catacosmesis furthers Adonis’ condescending tone and highlights Venus’ increasing desperation. Thus, while Shakespeare inverts the gender ‘roles’ of Venus and Adonis, Adonis’s direct and indirect speech demonstrate that traditional male-female power dynamics are not switched to the same extent.

The inversion of Petrarchan gender roles in *VA* is also evident in Venus’s use of rhetoric. An ideological construction of rhetoric as a ‘male’ language dates back to the classical era, with Cicero portraying orators as ‘upright, well-bred and virtuous men’.³¹ This assumption was adopted by Renaissance rhetoricians including George Puttenham, who described eloquence as ‘not (as many men think amiss) the property and gift of young men only, but rather of old men’.³² Beyond an informal understanding of the orator as male, women were also excluded from rhetoric on an institutional level. While ‘most women in sixteenth-century England were not rigorously educated’, Joan Gibson’s study of education in the Renaissance outlines how the humanist system ‘downplayed or prohibited the study of logic or rhetoric’ for girls who did receive schooling.³³ In this light, Venus’s oratory pushes against convention by transgressing the boundaries of ‘acceptable’ women’s speech:

³¹ Cicero, *De Oratore: Books I-II*, trans. by E.W. Sutton (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 2.xliii.

³² George Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesy*, ed. by Frank Whigham and Wayne A. Rebhorn (New York: Cornell University Press, 2007), p.226.

³³ Donawerth, p.263; Joan Gibson, ‘Renaissance Women and the Language Arts’, *Hypatia*, 4:1 (1989), 9-27 (p.12).

'A thousand honey secrets shalt thou know.
 Here come and sit, where never serpent hisses,
 And being set, I'll smother thee with kisses,
 And yet not cloy thy lips with loathed satiety,
 But rather famish them amid their plenty,
 Making them red, and pale, with fresh variety:
 Ten kisses short as one, one long as twenty.
 A summer's day will seem an hour but short,
 Being wasted in such time-beguiling sport.' (ll.16-24)

In the first instance of Venus's direct speech, hyperbole and metaphor – evident in 'a thousand honey secrets' and 'I'll smother thee with kisses' – cultivate a tone of eloquent desperation. Shakespeare also features extensive paradox and syneciosis, including 'famish them amid their plenty', 'red, and pale', 'short as one, one long as twenty' and 'a summer's day [...] an hour but short'. The resulting amalgamation of contradictions mimics the stasis of the infatuated and yearning lover. Moreover, 'red, and pale' attribute typical Petrarchan images of the idealised woman to Adonis. Thus, Venus takes on both the position and the language of the male orator, using extensive rhetoric in an attempt to verbally accost Adonis.

Lucy Gent suggests that as 'the normal situation in which a man woos a woman is reversed [...] the usual presuppositions' – that is, those in line with 'social convention' – 'no longer apply'.³⁴ This implies that Venus subverts the expectations for women's speech outlined in Chapter 1. However, contradicting Gent, Venus's rhetoric fails to achieve its objective. While paradox and syneciosis indeed depict Venus's eloquence and lovesickness – a state attributed to the male voices of many late sixteenth-century sonnets – they also imply Venus's lack of progress against Adonis' unmoving will.

³⁴ Lucy Gent, 'The Triumph of Rhetoric', *The Modern Language Review*, 69:4 (1974), 721-9 (p.721).

Supporting this, the chiasmus of line 22 structurally reflects Venus’s stasis, with Shakespeare’s use of sixians cultivating a repetitive, circuitous rhyme scheme. Thus, while Shakespeare highlights Venus’s eloquence and facility with rhetoric, she is nonetheless unsuccessful in her persuasive purpose.

Venus’s failed oratory may be the result of a lack of moral purpose. Lois Agnew outlines one Renaissance interpretation of rhetoric that stems from a classical emphasis on morality, stating that ‘for [Thomas] Wilson as for Cicero and the Stoics’, there is a ‘connection between the divine order, the natural and moral law [...] and the ethical responsibility of the orator’.³⁵ Shakespeare points to Venus’s corruption in the first instance of her speech. For instance, as the goddess denies the very existence of snakes – a symbol of sin – she ironically takes on the verbal persona of one through sibilance in ‘serpent hisses’, ‘smother’ and ‘kisses’. Moreover, while ‘wasted’ and ‘beguiling’ can simply imply ‘to spend’ and ‘to divert attention in some pleasant way’, they also hold negative connotations including ‘to destroy’ and ‘to delude’.³⁶ However, despite these suggestions of Venus’s lustful and dishonest intent, an early modern woman’s use of rhetoric – regardless of its purpose – was viewed as immoral in itself. Indeed, Gibson’s article outlines ‘the incompatibility of requirements of chastity, silence, and obedience – the omnipresent female virtues’ with the practice of eloquence.³⁷ Furthermore, Donawerth notes that ‘because of the gender role assigned to women [...] appropriating rhetoric was a particularly radical thing to do’.³⁸ In this context, Venus’s artful yet unsuccessful performance as an orator appears to foreground the sixteenth-century view of rhetoric as an exclusively ‘male’ language, rather than an exclusively moral one. More specifically, Shakespeare’s emphasis on Venus’ oratorical skill presents the failure of her

³⁵ Lois Agnew, ‘Ciceronian Ethos in Thomas Wilson’s *Arte of Rhetorique*’, *Rhetoric review*, 17:1 (1998), 93-106 (pp.102,104).

³⁶ *OED*, waste, v., senses 2, 8; beguile, v., senses 1.a., 5.

³⁷ Gibson, p.18.

³⁸ Donawerth, pp.265-6.

speech as unjust, highlighting the limiting effects of Renaissance rhetorical convention on female expression.

The failure of female rhetoric occurs again in *RL*, however, in this instance, Lucrece's purpose to prevent her rape is unquestionably virtuous. Lucrece's extensive oratory is a departure from Shakespeare's classical source texts. In Ovid's *Fasti*, Lucretia frequently falters or is entirely voiceless, evident in 'voice and power of speech and thought itself fled from her breast' and 'thrice she essayed to speak, and thrice gave o'er'.³⁹ Additionally, there are 'strong grounds for believing that Shakespeare knew' Paulus Marsus's commentary on Ovid – a text that 'frequently draw[s] attention to Lucretia's hesitations and stammerings'.⁴⁰ In contrast, Shakespeare's comment that 'her modest eloquence with sighs is mixed,/ Which to her oratory adds more grace' (ll.563-4) implies that Lucrece's rhetoric is in fact strengthened by her emotive pauses and sighs. Shakespeare's dual use of the passive voice here may imply humility and indirectness; however, Burrow notes that throughout this section of the poem, Lucrece's speech features 'a distinctively male vocabulary', cultivating 'a textbook example of the political oratory in this period'.⁴¹ This is evident where Lucrece's dialogue utilises techniques revered in rhetorical manuals such as Puttenham's *The Arte of English Poesy* and Peacham's *The Garden of Eloquence*:

By knighthood, gentry, and sweet friendship's oath;
 By her untimely tears, her husband's love;
 By holy human law, and common troth;
 By heaven and earth, and all the power of both, (ll.569-72)

³⁹ Ovid, *Fasti*, trans. by James G. Frazer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp.115,117.

⁴⁰ Burrow, pp.48-9,50.

⁴¹ Burrow, pp.51,52.

In this instance of indirect speech, rhyme royal stanza form and monosyllabic end words connect the concepts of religion and virtue including ‘Jove’, ‘oath’, ‘love’ and ‘troth’. This cultivates a semantic field of morality, which is evoked repeatedly as Lucrece calls upon Tarquin’s ‘kighthood’, his ‘friendship’ to Collatine, ‘holy human law’ and ‘common troth’ in attempt to divert him from his crime. Moreover, listing, anaphora and polysyndeton in line 72 structurally depict a build-up in Lucrece’s persuasive efforts, which she then repeats in direct speech:

My husband is thy friend; for his sake spare me.
Thyself art mighty; for thine own sake leave me;
Myself a weakling; do not then ensnare me.
Thou look’st not like deceit; do not deceive me. (ll.582-5)

Here, catacosmesis – evident in the descension from ‘husband’ to ‘thyself’ to ‘myself’ – and epistrophe continue Lucrece’s relentless onslaught of logical reasoning. The repeated personal pronoun ‘me’ also appeals to Tarquin’s empathy. Shakespeare’s rich use of rhetorical devices in Lucrece’s dialogue contrasts the animalistic imagery explored in Chapter 1 and highlights Lucrece’s civilised eloquence and dexterity with words.

Lucrece’s direct and indirect speech echo the arguments that Tarquin poses to himself regarding his nobility (‘True valour still a true respect should have’ (l.201)), his reputation (‘Yea, though I die, the scandal will survive’ (l.204)), and his relationship with Collatine (‘But as he is my kinsman, my dear friend,’ (l.237)). This presents Lucrece’s rhetorical abilities as equal to that of Tarquin – a nobleman, and thus the ideal candidate for the Ciceronian orator. Shakespeare furthers this argument through parallel syntax; for instance, Tarquin’s declaration “Have done,’ quoth he. ‘My uncontrolled tide/ Turns not, but swells the higher by this let’ (ll.645-6) is mirrored in the following stanza with: “Thou art,’ quoth she, ‘a sea, a sovereign king,/ And, lo, there falls into thy boundless flood’ (ll.652-3). The balanced structure and extended metaphor of an ‘uncontrolled tide’ leading to a

'boundless flood' aligns Lucrece's eloquence with her male counterpart. By presenting Lucrece and Tarquin as verbally matched and emphasising the moral purpose of Lucrece's rhetoric, Shakespeare once again evokes a sense of injustice. Lucrece's attempts to save herself do not fail on the grounds of her ability to express herself, but on social grounds which void her use of rhetoric due to her gender.

Danielle Clarke's description of 'a masculine verbal economy' in sixteenth-century England is evident where Shakespeare highlights Lucrece and Venus's impressive rhetoric, which is then disregarded by their male audience.⁴² Written one year apart, VA and RL form a collaborative message that gender ultimately determines a character's vocal dominance, regardless of the speech styles and the intention of the speaker. Thus, while early modern expectations are supported by the command of the male speaker, Shakespeare pushes against convention by showing the injustice – and danger – of defining persuasive speech as an exclusively male attribute.

⁴² Danielle Clarke, 'Women, Rhetoric and the Ovidian Tradition', in *This Double Voice: Gendered Writing in Early Modern England*, ed. by Danielle Clarke and Elizabeth Clarke (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), p.61.

CHAPTER 3

'When deep persuading oratory fails': Placing the Power of the Male Voice Into Doubt in *Hero and Leander*

Both Shakespeare and Marlowe probe the effectiveness of verbal expression when set against physical desire. In *RL*, Shakespeare highlights the inevitability of Lucrece's failed rhetoric by portraying male will as inexorable. Marlowe extends this observation in *HL* by questioning – and perhaps even satirising – the extent to which Leander's sexual triumph over Hero can be accredited to his persuasive skill. Here, Marlowe challenges early modern convention by casting doubt over the power of the 'masculine' language of rhetoric.

Shakespeare highlights the futility of Lucrece's eloquence by presenting the fulfilment of Tarquin's desire as inevitable. This is evident where Lucrece's appeal to Tarquin is cut off before its conclusion: "So let thy thoughts, low vassals to thy state –/ 'No more,' quoth he: 'By heaven I will not hear thee.'" (ll.666-7). Here, Shakespeare reverses the rhetorical device of aposiopesis – with the listener prompting the technique instead of the speaker – emphasising Tarquin's position of control and superiority. Moreover, line 666 breaks the poem's iambic pentameter, with Tarquin's extra syllables overriding Lucrece's voice. This is foreshadowed where the front-shifted noun phrases in 'His ear her prayer admits, but his heart granteth/ No penetrable entrance to her plaining' (ll.558-9) present Tarquin as the deciding force against Lucrece's pleas. Shakespeare therefore emphasises that Lucrece's failed oratory is not due to her rhetorical ability, but rather the pre-existing convention of masculine verbal authority.

As with *RL*'s Tarquin, *HL* also outlines Leander's insuppressible desire. However, rather than commenting on the overpowering effects of male will on female verbal expression, Marlowe probes how Leander's physical dominance and authority problematises the role of rhetoric in the process of courtship. Stephen Greenblatt comments that 'from his first play to his last, Marlowe is drawn to the idea of physical

movement'.⁴³ This observation can be extended to *HL*, which features a third-person omniscient voice that facilitates the narration of action. Physical movement in *HL* compliments Marlowe's use of 'feminine' speech features for Hero and furthers the ambiguity around her consent. This is evident in the second sestiad, which opens with Hero and Leander's union:

(Sweet are the kisses, the embracements sweet,
 When like desires and affections meet,
 For from the earth to heaven is Cupid raised,
 Where fancy is in equal balance peised.) (2.II.29-32)

The chiasmus of line 29 emulates the 'equal balance' of Hero and Leander's affections, implying Hero's consent. This sense of parity is furthered where Marlowe encloses the two rhyming couplets within parenthesis, cultivating a sense of contained harmony. However, soon after this depiction, chiasmus is employed again in 'strived with redoubled strength; the more she strived' (2.I.67). Here, Marlowe structurally emphasises the verb 'strive', which implies to 'wrangle' and 'to contend', highlighting Hero's fight to save her 'maidenhead' (2.I.76).⁴⁴ The narrative proximity of Hero's 'kisses' and 'striving' presents a conflict between Hero's desire for Leander and her longing to preserve her chastity. This contributes to the ambiguity around Hero's sexual consent later in the sestiad:

⁴³ Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p.194.

⁴⁴ *OED*, strive, v., senses 2.a., 3.a.

She trembling strove; this strife of hers (like that
Which made the world) another world begat
Of unknown joy. Treason was in her thought,
And cunningly to yield herself she sought.
Seeming not won, yet won she was at length. (2.II.291-5)

Here, Marlowe revisits the motif of striving, once again highlighting Hero’s struggle and lack of consent. However, the noun form ‘strife’ can imply either ‘the action of striving together or contending in opposition’.⁴⁵ The polysemy of ‘strife’ as an act of collaborative effort as well as one of antinomy contrasts the singularly combative connotations of ‘strive’. Therefore, Marlowe achieves ambivalence where ‘strife’ may imply Hero and Leander’s sexual union, or Hero’s resistance. In this light, the noun ‘treason’ could refer to Hero’s willing renunciation of her virginity, or to Leander’s betrayal of Hero in forcibly taking it. Furthermore, the verb ‘won’ may imply Leander’s physical overpowering of Hero, or his success in verbally wooing her. Chiasmus in line 295 evokes the syntax used early on in the sestiad, this time centralising the ambiguous meaning of ‘won’, rather than couple’s balanced affections. Marlowe’s revised use of chiasmus and the concept of strife places the initial certainty of Hero and Leander’s shared desire into doubt. Moreover, mid-line caesura (2.II.291-3, 295) and enjambment (2.II.291-3) achieve an uncontained structure that reflects the stanza’s unresolved double meanings and thus the ambiguity of Hero’s consent.

This obscurity allows Marlowe to open a dialogue regarding the importance – and the effectiveness – of Leander’s rhetoric in achieving his desire. This is evident in Hero’s initial response to Leander’s eloquence: “Who taught thee rhetoric to deceive a maid?” (1.II.338). Here, the verb ‘deceive’ directly acknowledges the Renaissance view of rhetoric as a form of deception. Cicero’s assertion that ‘the speech seems to represent, as it were, the character of the speaker [...] by adopting a peculiar mode of thought and

⁴⁵ *OED*, strife, n., sense 1.a.

expression' likens oratory to a dramatic performance and emphasises the rhetorician's purpose to *appear* sincere.⁴⁶ This theory was carried into the early modern period, evident in Puttenham's comment that rhetorical 'figures [...] be occupied of purpose to deceive the ear and also the mind'.⁴⁷ With this in mind, while Hero's comment may acknowledge Leander's skilled oratory, the very act of acknowledgement implies Leander's failure to veil his purpose.

The success of Leander's eloquence is placed into further doubt during his rhetorical passages. In "I would my rude words had the influence/ To lead thy thoughts, as thy fair looks do mine" (1.ii.100-1), the subjunctive mood suggests that Leander's speech does not have the influence over Hero that he desires. Hero's resistance against Leander's rhetoric is also evident in the couplet that precedes ninety-six lines of oratory: 'At last, like to a bold sharp sophister,/ With cheerful hope thus he accosted her.' (1.ii.197-8). In the simile 'like to a bold sharp sophister', Marlowe compares Leander to an ancient Greek public speaker, outlining his great talent in oratory. However, 'sophister' is end-rhymed with the verb 'accosted', that is 'to approach and speak to, esp. [...] in a bold, hostile, or unwelcome manner'.⁴⁸ The 'unwelcomeness' of Leander's speech both implies an aggression at odds with the verbal artistry of the sophist and depicts Hero as unreceptive to his oratory.

Crucially, 'accost' also holds strong physical connotations, including 'to draw near to or unto' and 'to come upon, esp. suddenly or violently; to assail'.⁴⁹ This highlights Leander's attempt to access Hero through action, rather than through rhetoric. Marlowe further emphasises Leander's physical pursuit in the second sestiad, which, like Shakespeare's *RL*, employs animalistic imagery to describe the couple's sexual union. In the simile, 'his hands he cast upon her like a snare' (2.ii.259), Leander is likened to a

⁴⁶ Cicero, 2.xliii.\

⁴⁷ Puttenham, p.238

⁴⁸ *OED*, accost, v., sense 1.a

⁴⁹ *OED*, accost, v., senses 2, 3

hunter and Hero to the hunted, placing their courtship within an instinctual, unsocialised realm. Marlowe then progresses to battle imagery: ‘And every limb did as a soldier stout/ Defend the fort, and keep the foeman out.’ (2.II.271-2). Here, the failure of Leander’s rhetoric is most overt as he is depicted as Hero’s enemy in war, resorting to attack the ‘fort’ after failing to verbally negotiate his way in. Marlowe’s choices of imagery place the scene of Hero and Leander’s consummation within contexts where words are redundant. Consequently, rhetoric is discarded altogether and Leander satisfies his desire through physical force.

Both Shakespeare and Marlowe highlight the absolute dominance of masculine desire in their epyllia. While Shakespeare centralises this dominance to expose unjust social limitations upon female expression, Marlowe challenges the early modern assumption of rhetoric as all-powerful. Notably, the motif of failed rhetoric giving way to physical action is addressed beyond the interactions of Hero and Leander. Marlowe depicts Neptune’s failure to verbally accost Leander and his consequent reliance on the physical action of gift-giving: ‘Tis wisdom to give much, a gift prevails/ When deep persuading oratory fails.’ (2.II.225-6). This aphoristic comment highlights a wider preoccupation in *HL* with the ultimate value of rhetoric in achieving one’s will.

An early modern emphasis on the irresistible power of rhetoric is outlined by Whigham and Rebhorn, who note that ‘for these [Renaissance] writers, as for virtually everyone else, the most important characteristic defining both oratory and poetry was their power, namely, their ability to possess and move their audience in whatever direction they wished’.⁵⁰ Supporting this, *The Garden of Eloquence* describes the orator as ‘in a maner the emperour of mens minds & affections, and next to the omnipotent God in the power of persuasion’.⁵¹ Peacham’s comparison of the orator’s influence to

⁵⁰ Frank Whigham and Wayne Rebhorn, ‘Introduction’, in *The Art of English Poesy*, ed. by Frank Whigham and Wayne Rebhorn (New York: Cornell University Press, 2007), pp.34-5.

⁵¹ Henry Peacham, *The Garden of Eloquence* (London: Imprinted by H. Iackson, 1577). *Literature Online* <<http://ezproxy.nottingham.ac.uk/login?url=https://www-proquest.com/ezproxy.nottingham.ac.uk/books/garden-eloquence-conteyning-figures-grammer/docview/2138580405/se-2?accountid=8018>> [accessed 05 December 2020].

both royalty and God is satirised in *HL*, with Marlowe depicting not only the failure of rhetoric, but the apparent insignificance of this failure in Leander's pursuit of Hero. In this light, Marlowe also undermines the narrative of the male love-address to the inaccessible female, popularised during the revival of the sonnet in the 1590s. Rather than persevering with his rhetoric, or lamenting his unreturned affection, Leander turns to action to achieve his desire. Thus, while *HL* does not focalise the social limitations on Hero's verbal expression – as Shakespeare does with Lucrece and Venus – Marlowe nonetheless challenges early modern convention by placing the effectiveness and importance of Leander's oratory into doubt. With this in mind, Marlowe shifts the power dynamic of *HL* by highlighting Leander's minimal verbal authority over Hero and his resultant reliance on physical dominance.

Conclusions

While Shakespeare and Marlowe revive the classical epyllion and a selection of Ovidian source texts, their poems remain alert to the gendered speech conventions of the sixteenth century. In *VA*, *RL* and *HL*, this results in a power dynamic of guaranteed male authority. The ‘feminine’ qualities of silence and humility limit Lucrece and Hero’s agency to consent; the definition of rhetoric as a ‘masculine’ speech style voids Lucrece and Venus’ capabilities in the art of persuasion; and, crucially, the insignificance of the spoken word in Leander’s sexual conquest of Hero presents male will as an inexorable force. With these points considered, King’s assertion that ‘above all, the early modern is the age of the emergence of woman’s voice, the other voice’ is contradicted where Shakespeare and Marlowe affirm male dominance through the direct and indirect speech of their epyllia.⁵²

However, by highlighting the inevitability of Lucrece’s disregarded verbal expression, Shakespeare presents her vulnerability to abuse as the result of cultural limits on women’s speech. Moreover, the emphasis on Lucrece and Venus’s rhetorical abilities foregrounds the injustice of their failure to persuade. Thus, while Shakespeare follows early modern ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ speech conventions, he focalises the negative and unnecessary impact of these conventions on the female experience. In contrast, Leander’s reliance upon physical action to dominate Hero challenges the notion of the Renaissance man’s all-powerful rhetoric. In this light, Hero’s interrogative “who taught thee rhetoric to deceive a maid?” (1.II.338) not only ridicules Leander for his failed oratory, but also the early modern assumption that ‘eloquence is of great force’.⁵³ Therefore, Greenblatt’s observation that Marlowe intended ‘to invent fictions only to create and not to serve God or the state’ is only partially true.⁵⁴ Rather than achieving a

⁵² King, p.27.

⁵³ Puttenham, p.226.

⁵⁴ Greenblatt, pp.220-1.

detached focus on artistic or entertainment value, *HL* engages with the state by undermining the position and power of men within Renaissance culture.

Shakespeare and Marlowe's subtle challenging of sixteenth-century speech conventions could be reflective of the developing sentiment in Renaissance Europe that confronted the exclusion of women from certain public spheres. This tentative advancement can be seen, for example, in Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa's *Declamation on the Nobility and Preeminence of the Female Sex* (1529), which asserts 'that the difference of the Sexes consists only in the different Scituation of the parts of the Body'.⁵⁵ The deconstructed narrative of rhetoric as all-powerful and male-only in *VA*, *RL* and *HL* echoes Agrippa's argument that 'the woman is endued with the same rationall power, and Speech with the man'.⁵⁶ Thus, King's description of the emerging 'other voice' in early modern England is perhaps evident not only in the new authority of the female voice, but also in the voice of writers challenging the validity of speech conventions that assert and promote male superiority.

⁵⁵ Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa, *The Speech and Declamation of Henricus Cornelius Agrippa, concerning the Nobility of the Female Sex* (London: printed for Robert Ibbitson, 1652). EEBO <<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A75977.0001.001/1:5?rgn=div1:view=fulltext>> [accessed 12 April 2021].

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

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