THROUGH SILENCE SHE SPEAKS: THE REARTICULATION OF THE FEMALE VOICE IN SHAKESPEARE'S KING LEAR

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ABSTRACT: This essay explores the minimal dialogue and voice of Cordelia in relation to feminine resistance and rearticulation through silence and the female body. I will investigate the methods through which Cordelia is silenced and restricted by the central male patriarchal authority figure, her father Lear. Her death will function as a key point of examination, as it is through this silence that Lear is unable to impose his language onto her voice, and is instead situated in her position of voicelessness. This essay aims to demonstrate how Cordelia forms an alternative mode of communication, one that is difficult to interpret for the patriarchal ear and therefore challenging or impossible to control. She becomes valuable, even becoming the lynchpin of the play, in imparting one of the central themes of the text; that human beings should mean and feel what they say rather than rely on false, flattering dialogue.

In Shakespearean tragedy, the female heroine who disturbs the patriarchal system of authority is inevitably silenced through death. Female disturbances are caused and revealed often through their passionate speech, which is rigidly defined by the patriarchs in Shakespeare's plays as inappropriate and immodest for women. In this sense, Cordelia's vocal assertiveness upsets patriarchal valuation of women's silence, for as critic Christina Luckyj addresses, silence would bring women closer to the state of beasts (Luckyj p.40), and therefore make them, as believed by Shakespeare's patriarchal figures, below the status of men. This belief enables patriarchal society to disavow women's voices, and in turn limit the opportunities for female resistance. It is not, however, just through her suicide or murder that she is suffocated; her death is merely the culmination of an ongoing act by the men around her of interrogating and disassembling female speech and the female voice as an entity. The demise of female heroines is slow but visible, inscribed onto their deterioration of language, and particularly the site of their bodies, as they are subjected to emotional, verbal, and eventually physical brutality. It is in this manner that Cordelia of *King Lear* is choked of life, and therefore the opportunity to articulate her female identity or autonomy. As a result of being raised chiefly by male authorities, with no mother to intervene, Cordelia's voice and body have been defined to comply with and reflect masculine desires, all of which eventually become possible for her to bear only through non-existence.

Luckyj highlights that masculine humanist discourse designates speech as human subjectivity and agency, and silence as repression and negation (Luckyj p.51). However,

in Cordelia's case, this binary notion is countered through the fact that she not only speaks her truth, but does so through her silence and brevity of speech. Through her minimal dialogue, she is able to communicate more truthfully than were she to rely on excessive dialogue. Although speech acts as one of the few resources women had to fight against patriarchal authority, it is also a circumscription of speech, as opposed to selective silence, that functions as one of the most formidable tools of patriarchal power. A circumscription of speech refers to the limited language and vocabulary available to a woman for self-expression. Selective silence in this instance is where a woman opts out of using the constrained vocabulary assigned to her, instead choosing spaces where she can create and control new meanings.

Luckyj associates female silence with female disempowerment, for it signals to her 'an act of submission to the authority of [the women's] fathers or husbands' (Luckyj p.51). It is thus up to Cordelia to find new avenues through which to articulate her truth that protect her from the threat of imposed masculine judgment and control. Cordelia's voice does emerge powerfully from alternative sites: the substitute or ventriloquised speech of others, and the presence or absence of her dead body. In Shakespeare's tragedies, silence that exists as inversion and restriction can enable a new space for women where it is the body that talks, even in death.

In this paper, I will closely examine the speeches and deliberate silences of Cordelia, specifically how she responds to her father, and explore how patriarchal authorities like Lear respond and ensure the silencing of her voice as a way of preserving established meaning. I will then investigate how the final smothering of the female voice through death does not necessarily negate its power. I will demonstrate that for the Shakespearean heroine silence, or minimal dialogue and the refusal to speak, can function as a radical source of authority and a site of self-articulation. In particular, I will highlight that the solution to the silencing of the female voice by patriarchal control is for the female heroine to assemble and establish an alternative mode of feminine communication. This alternative mode, illegible to the patriarchal ear, functions to create a resistant space to the patriarchy within the play and to critique the inherent masculine violence and misogynistic logic that pervades the English language.

Cordelia's Re-Articulation of Voice in King Lear

Despite being positioned as the likely heroine of the play, Cordelia only appears in person for 4 of the play's 26 scenes and speaks a total of 113 lines in the entirety of the text, significantly fewer than her sisters. However, the moments in which her speech does occur carry all the more focus and weight. Cordelia's silence and minimal voice are a form of subversive, rebellious conformity in which she *appears* to comply with the patriarchal idealization of feminine silence while actually acting to sabotage Lear's commands (Hamamra p.1) and challenge his outdated, childish mindset.

Luckyj's insight that the ambiguity associated with silence can establish a space for possible insurgence from the female voice (Luckyj p.41), is something that the beginning of *King Lear* capitalizes on: It is Cordelia's refusal to elaborate on her love for

Lear, in verbal language to him, that is the inciting incident for the disruption of a traditional transfer of power between kings and their children. Shakespeare positions Cordelia's early dialogue in the form of asides – 'What shall Cordelia speak? Love, and be silent […] I am sure my love's/ More ponderous than my tongue' (1.1.62-78) – evincing an interiority almost equivalent to the soliloquies the male characters in his tragedies are readily presented with. The characters of Lear and Edmund in the play famously have instances of this, with their 'Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks' (3.2) and 'Nature thou art my goddess' (1.2) monologues respectively, the former conveying Lear's rage and disillusionment with the world he inhabits, and the latter suggesting Edmund's ambition to acquire what he believes to be rightful his. Here, from the very beginning Cordelia illustrates a comprehension of her situation, of the value of the human heart (Doody p.58), in which 'Love' cannot be simply smothered or twisted into words. In her comprehension of the divide between feeling and speaking, she reflects, as Charlotte Scott highlights, a Renaissance humanist understanding of how speaking too much or speaking thoughtlessly links the individual with manipulation and hence the scheming qualities of the devil (Scott p.1902). Thus, her validation of silence affirms her minimal voice as authoritative, connected to virtue and therefore God, rather than questionable and related to the devil.

Cordelia's initial choice to be silent can be read as her abiding by the conventional patriarchal code of female silence (Cox p. 150), framing her female voice as admirable due to its submissiveness. Shakespeare also conveys how Cordelia's honest speech is constrained and made insignificant through its opposition to Goneril and Regan, whose flattery and verbose declarations succeed in winning their father's favour and his transfer of power. 'Poor' Cordelia's assertion that 'I am sure my love's/ More richer than my tongue' (1.1.77-8), indicates the inappropriate and impossible nature of her sisters' claims of love toward their father: Her use of financial terminology like 'Poor' and 'richer' highlights that the honesty of the female voice is constrained by the patriarchal definition of love as a quantifiable, economic entity. The play re-contextualizes Cordelia's familial disobedience as a display of virtue and exhibits how the female voice's incorporation of relative silence undermines the patriarchal game of speech where expression must be ostentatious and thus insincere.

Shakespeare's play, under the patriarchal definition of love as quantifiable women's speech and language, is positioned as the medium through which women surrender everything verbally, and thereby emotionally and physically. Cordelia, however, cannot present Lear with 'all' that she is. Significantly her very first word to him when he asks that she "speak" before the rest of the court to ensure a potentially greater inheritance than her sisters, is the negative term 'Nothing'. The singular nature of the word directly rejects the elaborate mode of social address. While the accepted definition of such a term as 'nothing,' which is generally interpreted as 'void', turns Cordelia's intention as she uses it to imply that 'nothing in language can convey the depth of my love', hence the brevity of her speech. In subtly indicating the way that language's meaning can be twisted or misinterpreted, Cordelia affirms the unreliability and incapacity of language to express sincerity.

Catherine Cox asserts that Cordelia's deviation from the acceptable social conventions of expression takes her father's demand too literally (Cox p.147), thus making her tragically foolish in her inability to perceive that the problem is not the quality of love but rather the expression of it. I contend this argument in that Cordelia's response to Lear's demand builds on Goneril's earlier assertion that love is that which 'makes breath poor, and speech unable' (1.1.60). Potentially demonstrating a subtle acknowledgment of her sister and creating a shared female solidarity, Cordelia's incapacity to speak relates to the rigidity of courtly communication, dictated by the patriarchal reasoning that is incompatible with real endearment and caring. This makes her silence the only possible reaction, as her attempts at explanation may therefore risk undermining her female expression. Yet Cordelia's insistence that she 'cannot heave [her] heart into [her] mouth. [She] love[s] [his] majesty/ According to my bond, no more nor less' (1.1.91-3) utilizes heart imagery to emphasize her words as emerging from a place of authenticity and virtue. Were she to express her love in accordance with Lear's quantifying demands, it would involve a monstrous 'vivisection' (Rutter p.15), for her love is inscribed and located within her heart. In associating the father's request for "love" with imagery of consumption in which the heart is plucked and ultimately smothered by the 'mouth', Shakespeare establishes an impression of Cordelia's voice as quite literally choked as a consequence of Lear's desire for 'all' of her devotion, in action and word.

The term 'bond', which implies filial obligation, demonstrates a recognition of the linguistic and social bonds that legally tie women to patriarchal authority figures. Cordelia is aware of Lear's desire for her to assume the role of surrogate mother to him in his old age. Cordelia's rhetorical question 'Why have my sisters husbands, if they say/ They love you all?' (1.1 99-100) initially appears to be a disobedient questioning of male authority. She linguistically echoes the terminology of a marriage service, implying the impossibility of her being forever wed to her father: her husband must receive 'half' (1.1 102), and thus Lear cannot receive 'all' (1.1 104). In both examples, Cordelia's relations are determined by her filial obligation or 'bond' rather than affection, signaling an awareness that if love is to be quantified according to patriarchal law, 'she will play the game with a vengeance' (Hickey p.18). She demonstrates a notion of entitlement, where the 'bond' that she and Lear share, as she will 'Return [her] duties back as are right fit' (1.1 97), should determine her status as Lear's heir and exclude her from having to perform to justify her birthright. Cordelia's refusal to perform through choosing silence, representative of the rebellious female voice, illustrates how the identity of the daughter can be destabilized and diverge from the verbosity associated with patriarchal expression.

Furthermore, Cordelia's acknowledgment of Lear's impossible claim to make her summarise and quantify her affection highlights the way that custom dictates love in this play, underscoring the struggle the female voice undergoes when it is inevitably splintered by devotion to family, marriage, and self. By this means, Cordelia sets forth a different possibility for what love is: a truthful expression of emotion dictated not by long-winded, fawning sentences, but rather by the brevity of speech, the almost silent communication of understanding. Language, according to the play, cannot express

sincerity due to the way exaggeration is imposed as the way of communicating devotion by patriarchal authority. This is evidenced in Cordelia's reinterpretation and appropriation of Lear's own words:

> LEAR: So young and so untender?
> CORDELIA: So young, my lord, and true (1.1.108).

In her dialogue, she grammatically agrees with her father, initially implying a sense of submission, yet the curt brevity of her line carries an implicit sense of refusal. As in the case of *Hamlet*'s Ophelia, Cordelia's use of monosyllabic words ensures that her expression carries emphatic weight in every stress and evades the answer her paternal figure desires to hear. The play in this sense re-evaluates feminine unkindness as instead a virtue, through which truth is conveyed. Cordelia's broken syntax as she addresses Lear – 'If for I want that glib and oily art/ To speak and purpose not – since what I well intend/ I'll do't before I speak' (1.1.226-8) – implies a breakdown of language and hence a silencing of her voice. However, upon closer evaluation, her incomplete sentence can be argued to result from her integrity being too much for language to contain. In this sense, Shakespeare emphatically accentuates the very limitations of language. The 'glib and oily art', as often employed by Goneril and Regan, is a stifling disservice to female expression of integrity. Cordelia here articulates honesty through a defiance of language, through employing non-verbal communication, or being almost silent.

Cordelia's exit marks her refusal to not only participate in the language of deception and false love as employed by Goneril and Regan, but a resistance to what Lear defines as 'love'—a means of satisfying the recipient's ego and a surrender to accepted patriarchal law. Her final assertion before the court and her father is that 'Time shall unfold what plighted cunning hides/ Who covert faults at last with shame derides/ Well may you prosper' (1.1.282-4). Her witty personification of time as a mocking entity that will reveal hypocrisy alludes to Proverbs 28.13: "'He that hideth his sins, shall not prosper"'. Her emphasis on the active verb 'hideth' underscores the significance of deeds over words. By virtue of this, the play reinforces not only her awareness of her sisters' deception of their father, in order to acquire his authority and favour, but also her awareness of her father's self-deception; that his authority is absolute and incorruptible. The play may push the narrative of forgiveness, but the fact that there is no direct clear verbal statement on Cordelia's part can be interpreted as her withholding such forgiveness on her own terms. Her lack of forgiveness implies a refusal to be judged according to patriarchal reasons, and Cordelia never officially or verbally reverses this refusal for the rest of the play. In this manner, I contest Stanley Cavell's framing of the play as a female forgiveness narrative, and his notion that all of Cordelia's words are "'of love; to love is all she knows how to do. That is her problem, and the cause of the tragedy of *King Lear*"'(Scott p.1896). Even her hope that Lear has not 'lost [her] in [his] liking' (1.1.235), while appearing initially as an entreaty for his approval, appropriates his earlier warning to her marital partners 'T'avert your liking a more worthier way' (1.1.212). In subtly attributing herself, and her mode of expression, as a 'worthier way', Cordelia

manifests how Lear's language of affection, and the patriarchal expression of love as a whole, ultimately betrays a resounding hollowness. The words of affection are only words of "love" according to the paternal definition of love as unquestioning one-sided devotion on the part of the child. Cordelia's silence therefore devalues and undermines Lear's public pride and thus patriarchal speech as a whole (Hamamra p.1, p.32). Shakespeare suggests that the resilience of Cordelia's voice and her self-possession are accomplished through her satirical, sardonic approach to the arbitrary nature of the English language.

Cordelia's voice and identity are marked by the absence of a guiding mother figure, since there is no *Queen* Lear to speak for or support her in her banishment. The queen goes unmentioned, apart from when she is invoked to challenge Lear's paternity. Goneril's pointed reflection,'He always loved our sister most, and with what poor judgment he hath now cast her off appears too grossly' (1.1.292), corroborates that female solidarity in a patriarchally defined world is impossible when the power given to women is dependent on the approval of men. The woman, and hence the female voice, is incorporated into male fantasy and acts as an extension of *his*, rather than her own, authority. Cordelia, in her attempts at communication, evokes a genuine affection for her father, but her resistance to flattering him contributes to the tragedy that unfolds. That the events of the play are a result of Cordelia's attempt to break from the patriarchal norm highlights the costs of female speech, and its radical, destabilizing potential.

Cordelia's Echo: The Fool as Ventriloquist of Feminine Rearticulation

Cordelia's absence through the remainder of Act 1, 2, and 3 seems to connote that the female voice, in verbally resisting patriarchal authority, can only be stifled. In spite of her physical absence, Cordelia's female voice identifies its substitute through the figure of the Fool. This character is notably never on stage at the same point as Cordelia, evoking the traditional theatrical role of a double part for a single performer. If the Fool is treated as Cordelia's vocal representative, her voice is shown to be maintained throughout the play, and this makes her demise more impactful, as Lear loses the brave child who was faithful to her father all along (Hickey p.51). As such viewing these two characters as ultimately one and the same, as twin resistant voices in opposition to patriarchy, creates 'a poignant close and account for what happened in the end to one of Shakespeare's finest characters' (Stroup p.131). That Lear addresses the Fool as 'Pretty knave' (1.4.95) and 'boy' (1.4.105), bears an element of androgyny in the likely young and certainly male actor, who would also have played Cordelia. This recalls Bilal Hamamra's insight that the silencing of female characters is associated with theatrical performance, in that the boy actor who performs the female part is haunted by the potential of his voice "breaking" into the male register, and thus indirectly exposes the masculine authority's inability to articulate the female voice (Hamamra p.1).

In Cordelia's physical absence, the Fool plays with and deconstructs the rhetoric that Lear has employed to render his daughter silent. In particular, the Fool states that Lear 'has banished two on's daughters and did the third a blessing against his will'

(1.4.101-2). His idiom establishes a subtle criticism of Lear's inversion of order while simultaneously positioning the female heroine's voice as now free from his authority. Cordelia, in receiving a punishment that the Fool positively reinterprets as a 'blessing', no longer has to be subjected to the patriarchal gaze like Goneril and Regan. The play subversively reframes Cordelia's body, and hence her voice, as being emancipated through its absence and banishment, suggesting that Lear has done her a favour by excluding her from the increasing violence of the kingdom. Goneril and Regan are in this manner the ones who are 'banished' in that they are compelled to remain and reside in Britain and thus be controlled by the authority of the father. Furthermore, the Fool's unconventional use of authoritative language in his address to Lear, referring to him as 'my boy' (1.4.134), infantilizes Lear to expose his behaviour as ultimately childish. His appropriation of Lear's own reference to him represents a breakdown and reversal of established hierarchies between master and servant and father and child. As opposed to the male authority being the accepted voice of reason for the audience to adhere to, Shakespeare thereby frames the Fool, and Cordelia's voice, in the position of tutor to the king and the audience. His assertion 'Sirrah, I'll teach thee a speech' (1.4.113), reveals Lear's inability to recognize honest speech. In subtly linking back to the way that Lear could not recognize Cordelia's speech, female speech becomes associated with honesty. Thus, the Fool must instruct him in a better mode of speaking, away from crude curses and imperative language.

Under the guise of folly and wordplay, the Fool boldly and ironically speaks truth to power, challenging the extent of Lear's imposed reality. His advice that Lear should 'Have more than thou showest/ Speak less than thou knowest' (1.4.116-17), asserts that conciseness or 'less', a resistance of speech that Cordelia practices during the love test, is a signifier of virtue. Cordelia's positionality, being inscribed in the Fool's advice, enables her voice to simultaneously defy the familial obligations and gender conventions that would otherwise restrain such a proliferation of free speech and prose language. The patriarchal tongue is rendered as excessive and therefore a subject of mockery and interrogation. Moreover, the Fool reiterates Cordelia's earlier expression of 'nothing', in mocking Lear's earlier response to his daughter. He highlights that 'This is nothing, fool/ Then tis like the break of an unfee'd lawyer, you have me nothing for't. Can you make no use of nothing, nuncle?' (1.4.126-9). The employment of mercenary language in referencing an 'unfee'd lawyer' implies a corruption of law, connoting Lear's abusive disavowal of Cordelia from her rightful inheritance of wealth. In addition, the Fool's reference to Lear as a 'shelled peascod' (1.4.190), summons an image of empty nothing that carries overtones of sexual impotence, inverting an image typically attributed to female sexuality. Together with the divisive image of Lear having 'pared thy wit o'oth side and left nothing ith the middle' (1.4.177-9), thus rendering him as an exposed centre, Shakespeare characterises the male patriarchal body as, in reality, an unreliable, unknowable entity. The unease that the man experiences from this realisation is then projected onto the female body, a projection ensured through the silencing of the female voice. In associating the female body with uncertainty, which is therefore in need of control or monitoring, silencing becomes the apparatus through which the paternal

authority makes 'thy daughters thy mothers' (1.4.163-4). Masculine power infantilizes itself as dependent on the women, made maternal carers, in order to continue their dominating, yet antiquated, speech.

Because the Fool acts as a reminder of Cordelia's truth, he no longer becomes necessary by Act 4 Scene 4, in which Lear recognizes the error of his "foolish" ways, having developed a conscience. Cordelia's voice has up to this point been labeled the 'Fool', implying her words to be a site of untrustworthiness. But the female-coded truth-teller can only be called the 'Fool' for so long before the truth expressed becomes unavoidable. The Fool's final line 'And I'll go to bed at noon' (3.6.82) sets an anticipated disappearance, suggesting that the spirit and onstage presence of Cordelia has been dormant and can now awaken through his sleep (Doody p.47). In highlighting how the Fool dies with the reappearance of Cordelia, the female voice no longer needs a ventriloquist. Throughout her bodily absence, Cordelia's offstage presence assumes authority in her silent rebuke of Lear's behaviour (Hickey p.35). Lear's brief moment of recognition is driven by his attempt to designate the Fool as representative of the female voice of Cordelia. He wants to embody Cordelia in her absence so that he may achieve some form of forgiveness from her voice. When he desires to house the Fool in his hovel, Lear references him as 'houseless poverty' (3.4.26), calling attention to the conditions in which he has placed Cordelia and thus to his own sinful behaviour. The voice of his daughter makes him realize that his own actions are to blame for his beggarly condition, and it gives him a chance to impart the empathy and humanity he previously failed to offer her. The Fool in this manner embodies Lear's conscience, arguably making the female voice of Cordelia his 'inner voice' (Stroup p.130), establishing a 'torment of self-accusation' (Hickey p.48) that in turn transforms the patriarchal authority himself into a 'nothing' entity. This is only achieved, however, after he has attributed the female body as 'nothing' in the first place. His first conflict with Goneril's cruelty is brought on by his defense of the Fool's behaviour, which reads as him realizing what he should have done to protect Cordelia. The play advances Stroup's insight of this moment as an 'unconscious return […] which brings him ironically at once to madness, to regeneration, and to peace of mind' (Stroup p.130), where sensibility is restored through acknowledgment of patriarchal injustice and pride. Lear arguably references Cordelia in death as 'my poor fool [that] is hanged' (5.3.304), an expression of endearment that implies a recognition of Cordelia as the one who was speaking the truth to him all this time. The play thus makes the female voice and body, while still under the male paternal gaze, a site of morality and enlightenment rather than victimhood and darkness.

The silencing of the female voice through male authorial control

Cordelia's father, the central male figure in her life who should offer guidance and understanding, instead spearheads the silencing of her female voice. Notably, Lear condemns women as devilish in nature:

> Down from the waist they are centaurs, though women all above […]
> beneath is all fiend's: there's hell, there's darkness, there is the sulphurous
> pit, burning, scalding, stench, consumption! Fie, fie, fie! Pah, pah! (4.6.121-5).

Through bestial imagery, the female body is associated with fiery damnation. Lear identifies the female voice, as located in a space of 'darkness', linked with the dark site of the womb inverted as a place of destructive 'consumption', and hence a site of untrustworthiness. In this manner Lear evokes the notion of women as innately dishonest and therefore subhuman and inferior to men (Platt p.117). Even describing the female voice causes masculine language to disintegrate into spitting and nonsensical cursing – 'Fie, fie, fie! Pah, pah!' - situating women as a disruption of order and understanding. The nonsensical cursing and spitting is as if the masculine authority is becoming an animal, the status associated with women, and thus further linking women with a disruption of order and understanding. Cordelia is thus a radical danger that can only be kept at bay through application and verification of the patriarchal language.

Lear's address to Cordelia concerns a notion of "affection" as determined by the features of hierarchy and competition of kingdom and property between family and sisters, making such a transfer of power, and love, a site of spectacle before the British court (Holahan p.422). This is embodied for instance in Lear's attribution of Cordelia as 'our joy […] to whose young love. The vines of France and milk of Burgundy. Strive to be interessed, what can you say to draw a third more opulent than your sisters?' (1.1.83-6). The employment of the term of endearment 'joy' together with the royal "we" in referring to Cordelia as 'our joy', reflects Lear's desire to bestow upon her the largest, 'more opulent' third of possessions, even when his kingdom is meant to be divided equally. Cordelia's language and speech are meant to please Lear and consequently remap Europe (Holahan p.422). Although Lear is not exactly in the wrong to desire to listen to Cordelia's affectionate tongue, he is wrong, as argued by Michael Holahan, to prescribe its expression as a prerequisite for her inheritance of his power. Shakespeare parallels Lear's treatment of Cordelia with his treatment of his kingdom, in which patriarchal authority tries to maintain ownership over property, even while giving it away. In doing so, Lear ensures that Cordelia is dependent on his authority over her voice.

Furthermore, Lear's emphasis on her relation to the 'vines' of France and 'milk' of Burgundy reduces Cordelia's significance by creating a reminder that the primary intent of the occasion of transferring property is to determine who she will marry. He therefore reminds her that another patriarchal figure will continue maintaining her obedience and subservient voice. Lear reflects the striking ambiguities, double standards, and hypocrisies of Renaissance conduct books that were distributed at the time of the play's publication, wherein young women are encouraged to consider their moral being, rather than social opinion, all while they are instructed by social opinion on how to present themselves (Luckyj p.38). Cordelia is encouraged to be accessible and untouchable, as both marital exchangeable goods and sealed-away treasure. Women can speak, but only when it is 'circumscribed' (Luckyj p.36), indicating the unstable

paradoxical nature of the laws surrounding female silence. Lear's surprise upon Cordelia's initial refusal to engage in flattery – 'Mend your speech a little/ Lest you may mar your fortunes' (1.1.93-4) is marked by an abrupt shift into prose by Cordelia. This shift reveals the extent to which any challenging of male authority involves disassembling the structures of language, and thus the patriarchal thought or ideology that underpins it. In its minimality, Cordelia's female voice challenges the masculine association of speech with financial value, and hence plentifulness linked with success. In his response to Cordelia's refusal to impress him with her words, Lear insists that 'Nothing will come of nothing' (1.1.90). Through invoking the euphemism of 'nothing' for the vagina, as the empty, dark, and encompassing identity for the woman as a whole, ironically underscores that the 'nothing', at least from a patriarchal viewpoint, is female speech. Hence the honesty and sincerity that patriarchal authority supposedly desires, and is embodied by the female voice, is missed.

Lear's misrecognition and patriarchal domination of Cordelia's voice occur through a process of othering her body. He treats Cordelia's resistant silence not simply as a child's disobedience of their father but rather as an attack by the subhuman on the redundant needs of men. He attributes her as 'The barbarous Scythian/ Or he that makes his generation messes/ to gorge his appetite, shall to my bosom/ Be as well-neighboured, pitied, and relieved/ As thou my sometime daughter' (1.1.117-21). Lear's fierce disavowal and delegitimization rely on citation of "savagery" of people from the Black Sea and Asia Minor coastal area. Cordelia emerges as voiceless through him transforming her into a cannibalistic being, someone who is a foreign threat and "other", and thus undeserving of understanding from British power. Yet his representation of Cordelia as a monstrous creature who feeds on her young ironically mirrors his own position as the paternal authority demanding his daughters to feed him with their words. The play shows how the female voice can, like a reflective surface, reveal back the image and qualities that the male authority perceives, consciously or unconsciously, in himself (Holahan p.420). In this way, Shakespeare suggests that if the patriarchal authority, as embodied by Lear, cannot reject or dismiss the female voice, then he can only avoid it through sight or the refusal to 'ever see/ That face of hers again' (1.1.265-6), placing the female body off-stage. Shakespeare thus demonstrates how female muteness is ensured and the female presence is erased through men's refusal to see them. This deliberate blindness ironically contributes to the very downfall of Lear as a patriarchal authority: as a result of his banishment of Cordelia, the corrupt ascension of Goneril and Regan is enabled, and he will be overthrown as ruler.

In response to the increasingly distinguishable and unmissable female voice, the paternal authority embodied by Lear can only silence his daughter—a symbol of feminine resistance—by reducing his relationship with Cordelia, as well as her relationships with others, to purely economic functions. He cites their connection in the past tense, implying that 'When she was dear to us, we did hold her so/ But now her price is fallen' (1.1.197-8). The use of possessive language in the form of 'hold' and moral terminology like 'fallen', paired with the monetary term 'price', highlights how Cordelia's voice is determined by the way in which her body is situated in a hierarchy of

financial profit. Her value as defined by masculine terms of marriage and inheritance is highly contingent on the patriarchal figure's approval, who here shockingly subverts his responsibilities by refusing to ensure her the likelihood of a husband in the Duke of Burgundy. Hence the removal of Cordelia's dowry in turn limits her voice's agency in bargaining her fate in the play's world Lear's assertion that 'truth will be her dower' (1.1.109) ironically refuses to perceive "truth" as valuable, labeling the rich integrity of Cordelia's minimal speech as poverty within the same framework of patriarchal understanding. In being disfigured into 'little-seeming substance […] And nothing more' (1.1.199-201), together with depriving her of his 'folds of favour' (1.1.219), Lear appropriates Cordelia's own language of 'nothing'. A term once used by Cordelia to demonstrate the limits of language, as controlled by masculine authority, to express feminine agency and genuine love, is now merely an invocation of the emptiness contained within the feminine body. He thus ironically embodies the masculine anxiety toward the female womb, from where as a baby he must emerge and be associated with nothingness or 'femaleness'.

However, rather than there being no male authority figure to substantiate her words, Cordelia receives an ally in the form of the noble France. The male authority here, rather than acting as reinforcement, steps in to question Lear's sentencing and definition of her female body: 'her offense/ Must be of unnatural degree/ That monsters it, or your fore-vouched affection/ Fall'n into taint; which to believe her,/ Must be a faith that reason without miracle/ Could never plant in me' (1.1.219-24). France's tone of disbelief that Cordelia could even attempt something so 'unnatural' that would 'monster' Lear's love, as represented by her plain-speaking female voice, arguably provides an exposure of the fragility and hypocrisy of patriarchal "love". He can in this sense model the behaviour Lear ought to embody not only as king but as a father toward his daughter's voice. Hickey contends in this light that Frances decides on truth over profit, as truth itself is a profit to him in the form of Cordelia's "richer" character (Hickey p.38). However, I contend that despite the seeming reclamation of Cordelia's agency and expression, France only rearticulates the language of economic profit in relation to her body:

> Thee and thy virtues here I seize upon […] thrown to my chance […]
> Not all the dukes of waterish Burgundy/ Can buy this unprized, precious maid of me (1.1.254-61).

The conquering imagery established through the use of the term 'seize' in relation to Cordelia's hand now being physically grasped, paired with the passive verb 'thrown', implies Cordelia's lack of mobility as an 'unprized' reward. The play reiterates how kindness cannot exist even when expressed by male authority, so long as masculine language remains in its original objectifying state, designed to entrap the woman's body as a vessel reflective of male desires. Shakespeare thus displays the impossibility of the female voice to articulate itself when the words of women like Cordelia are reliant on the approval of patriarchal authority in order to be legitimized in the play's world.

Interestingly, Cordelia's silencing does not stem solely from male characters verbally degrading her speech. Instead, it arises from Shakespeare's decision as the male author to keep her character offstage until Act IV, thereby relegating her to a state of absence and abstraction. Through her verbal and physical absence, Shakespeare positions the male voices as Cordelia's only form of characterisation or legibility:

> Gentleman: You have seen/ Sunshine and rain at once, her smiles and tears/ Were like a better way. Those happy smilets/ That played on her ripe lip seemed not to know/ What guests were in her eyes, which parted thence/ As pearls from diamonds dropped (4.3.17-22).

The play here invokes the pieta image of the Virgin Mary mourning the loss of her son. In pairing this holy image with an obsessive use of sensory imagery to articulate her emotions as either earthly 'Sunshine and rain' or material 'pearls from diamonds', Cordelia's body, and in turn her voice, are idealized into a symbol of compassion. In this sense, her body is reoriented toward the maternal care and nursery of her father, an act she resisted in her very first scene. Cordelia, iconized as a saintly figure, who 'shook/ The holy water from her heavenly eyes' (4.2.30-1), is consequently detached from human expression and thus tangible language and communication by the masculine rhetoric. Shakespeare hints at Cordelia's possible awareness of how her image will become disembodied under the male account and tongue. Furthermore, the Gentleman's detailing of her learning of her sisters' betrayal of her father is expressed as a bodily reaction in which 'she heaved the name of father/ Pantingly forth as if it pressed her heart/ Cried 'Sisters, sisters, shame of ladies, sisters!' (4.3.26-8). In this instance, the heart imagery she employed at the beginning in opposition to offering herself entirely to her father is reappropriated and repurposed into a communication of devotion and loyalty. The repetition of her outcry 'sisters', creates an eventual emptying of meaning and resignification of the familial term as bitter. The play reflects how a disassociation from female solidarity in service of paternal dedication is what results in the female voice becoming subsumed and integrated into patriarchal society.

Cordelia exits Act 1 as an adoring but rigidly self-righteous daughter, dedicated to her own difficult truth, the preservation of her voice, and her father's benefit. Her reflection that she 'would prefer [Lear] to a better place' (1.1.276) carries the implication that she desires him to be restored to the throne that he has just relinquished. Shakespeare in this manner displays a degree of political adeptness and shrewdness: This portrayal makes Cordelia appear formidable rather than the meek, helpless figure that masculine language and authority designate her to be.

However, Lear's dream of restoring the old order and unquestioned patriarchal control demands Cordelia to surrender her independence, separateness, and sexuality. Were Cordelia to possess her own sexual desires, she could never completely assume the role of maternal carer to Lear. She is the beloved daughter on the other side of the water or 'bourn' (3.6.26), who is unable to speak, and she may only return from the border of the bourn by way of losing herself. The Cordelia that is reassembled in Act IV is

arguably the Cordelia of Lear's fantasy, serving purely his needs, particularly in contrast to the Cordelia of Act 1 who is a flesh and blood being with her own interior demands. In particular, her declaration asserts a desire to restore her father to the throne:

> 'O dear father. It is thy business that I go about […] No blown ambition doth our arms incite/ But love, dear love and our aged father's right' (4.4.23-8).

This politically motivated 'business' can be read as her employing her father's figure or body as a way to ensure her own power and restored agency of voice. However, the echoing of the biblical passage in which Christ 'must go about [his] father's business' (Luke 2.49) reinstates her as a saintly saviour-like figure, even if she aspires to a power greater than Lear's. The play, in addition to Cordelia's identification of her father as 'child-changed' from his 'abused nature' (4.4.15-17), establishes a compassionate tone that inscribes her voice as one of maternal understanding of Lear's need to be cared for as a child. Thus, while the audience may potentially see some resemblance to Cordelia's old self in the poignance of her yearning to find her father, as Janet Adelman suggests, they are no longer encouraged to consider Cordelia's motivation (Adelman p.125).

I would counter this to argue that Cordelia's re-entrance in Act 4 Scene 4, in which she is heralded with 'drum and colours' and 'officers and soldiers', strikingly contrasts the Gentleman's angelic words beforehand. Here she demonstrates an impressive militarism and transformation of despair, or feminine emotion into action. Cordelia's voice is thereby articulated through actions over words, exposing the hypocrisies and insincere exaggerations inherent within patriarchal defined language. The male voice is in this way positioned as verbal, while the female voice is conveyed through enactment or action. Cordelia is moreover capable of employing her feminine voice to reproduce Lear's invocation of the winds – 'Was this a face/ To be oppose'd against the warring winds?/ To stand against the deep dread-bolted thunder/ In the most terrible and nimble stroke/ Of quick cross lightning?' (4.7.31-5). Her use of battle imagery and epic epithets, conventionally employed by male characters and voices, destabilizes the gendered space of language in order to indicate the arbitrary nature of speech.

Nevertheless, Cordelia selflessly adheres to Lear's demand that she 'forget, and forgive' (4.7.83-4), implying a willingness to maintain her father's title and life and that the female voice will eventually accept or ignore the patriarchal brutality inflicted on her. The reduction of Cordelia to a maternal voice is framed as positive and a source of empathy for the patriarchal condition. Shakespeare's complicity here reflects how the male author carries responsibility for the reproduction of the patriarchal authored language and fantasy as embodied by Lear's desires. His play enables an endorsement that recompenses the male authority's faults, for the woman will eventually come around to see his perspective as legitimate.

However, Cordelia does not demonstrate total forgiveness toward her father, positioning her voice as still ultimately resistant to his efforts to control and subsume her identity. In particular, Cordelia only addresses her 'father' (4.7.17, 26) as such when he is

unconscious, whereas once he is awake her acknowledgment of him is formalized into 'lord' or 'majesty' (4.7.44). The play's lack of complete absolution seems to imply that the agency of the female voice can only be maintained through a deliberate act of self-silencing and the restriction of genuine emotion. Cordelia thus performs an act that according to patriarchal understanding inherently implies submission, and reinterprets her silence as a form of resistance.

I contest in this manner Van Domelen's assertion that Cordelia 'remains the same throughout the play, and her love is altered neither by Lear's transferral of affection nor by her subsequent removal to France' (Van Domelen p.135). Once she is within Lear's sight however, his attribution of her as a 'soul in bliss […] a spirit' (4.7.46-49) associates her with an immateriality that assumes an airy and intangible quality to her voice. Cordelia is entrapped once more in patriarchal language and understanding. The moving nature of their father-daughter reunion and reconciliation, in which she insists that she repeatedly has 'No cause, no cause' (4.7.75) for revenge, implies initially a thwarting of his assumptions regarding her desire for his suffering, as a continuation of her notion of 'nothing' as the transgressive entity of the female voice. Cordelia's expression of love here demonstrates the absence of humility within masculine reasoning and language, potentially insisting on a reformation of communication as a whole. She escapes the problems of rhetoric by speaking so little. This is arguably undercut through her bodily movement of kneeling, insisting that her father's hands be placed 'in benediction o'er me' (4.7.57-8). Her physicality is to an extent transgressive, in that her reliance ultimately on her body over her words for expression implies a defiance of verbose language from stifling her truth, creating a more sincere form of communication. Yet this action, typically coded as a position of supplication or submission, shows how the female body's internalization of subservience to male authority as inscribed by patriarchal language, ultimately foils and diminishes the female voice. Hence, the radical change in the male-female and father-daughter relation between Lear and Cordelia is prevented.

Despite this internalization, Cordelia's language in Act V Scene 3 displays a sensitive awareness of injustice that reflects her voice's capacity for resistance. Her address of Edmund pinpoints his wrongdoing:

> For thee, oppressed King, I am cast down/ Myself could else outfrown
> false fortune's frown (5.3.5-6).

The employment of stoic, royal language in response to her and her father's capture evokes the patient attitude of kings. Shakespeare endows Cordelia with an authoritative element to her speaking, implying that the female voice can reappropriate speech associated with the king for her own disruptive purposes. In this manner, she equally invalidates Edmund's later assertion that plans to have Cordelia hanged in prison so that he can place 'the blame upon her own despair, that she fordid [killed] herself' (5.3.252-3). The play shows the fallacy of the patriarchal misogynist reasoning that stereotypes the female mind and voice as mad and unreasonable. Cordelia also rejects

suicide as a means of conveying her presence through absence. Shakespeare thus proposes a path through which the female voice can be heard without her deceased body being the only means through which it is registered. Cordelia responds with the rhetorical question 'Shall we not see these daughters and these sisters?' (5.3.7), a summoning of the presence of Goneril and Regan. She thus creates a call for female discussion that could potentially resolve into feminine solidarity and dismantling of patriarchal violence. However, Lear interrupts with an affirmative repetition of 'No, no, no, no' (5.3.8). Once Cordelia is registered by this definitive negative language, she does not speak again. Shakespeare signifies that it is here through the male authority's imposition to speak, rather than merely her death, that the female voice is strangled.

Cordelia's verbal and physical hanging

Despite the seemingly moving modesty exhibited in Lear's final speech toward his daughter, where it appears that what it means to lose and win is a process of rearrangement (Holahan p.418), in reality, it represents a final form of entrapment of Cordelia's voice. Lear employs the device of vision, coded here as patriarchal, as an ironic reversal of his refusal of sight in Act I Scene 1. He proposes an inseparable unity with Cordelia:

> We two alone will sing like birds I'th the cage [….] laugh/ At gilded butterflies […] He that parts us shall bring a brand from heaven/ And fire us hence like foxes' (5.3.9-23).

The repetition of the collective pronoun 'we' as an insistence of two-ness, paired with the frequent animalistic imagery as if to garner a division of his and Cordelia's humanity from bestial earth, transforms Cordelia's image, and thus her voice, into an entity that 'alone' exists for him. Lear does not desire to even listen to the term 'I' or 'thee' that could come from her, apart from 'we' as symbolic of separation, in which his eruption, as highlighted by Janet Adelman, envelops Cordelia and reassembles her as a feature of himself (Adelman p.122). As a result, Cordelia can be assembled to aid his dream so long as he can resist the potential of distinction between them, evaporating Cordelia's identity into his own. Lear can visualize a long-term incarceration provided that Cordelia is present, but her demise is othered, considered as another matter entirely. Rather than showing maturity of the patriarchal authority, Lear's assurance of his delusion that he will be able to spend his final days on earth in the maternal love and consoling presence of Cordelia returns to the fool's paradise of desiring to 'set my rest/ On her kind nursery' (1.1.123-4).

The emphasis on 'alone' further reinforces how Cordelia's female expression will become isolated from the space of her father's ears, or rather, in this context in which her father and she are one, from her own. Lear's fantastical insulation of himself against reality establishes a literal (female) self-absorption as it relates to Cordelia's consciousness. His pitiful relinquishment of authority comes at the cost of Cordelia's

consciousness, a destabilization of her voice that made itself tangible through responsiveness to justice and feeling. Though Lear's reference to Cordelia's 'sacrifices' (5.3.20) potentially implies gratitude for her love and devotion in her efforts to rescue him, and the loss of agency both have endured, in reality, his use of the phrase anticipates a willing offering of Cordelia to oblivion or death in the sense of her self becoming subsumed by his language. Lear's embrace of Cordelia therefore reads as less a moment of reconciliatory intimacy or unity, and rather as a form of smothering enclosure, a final physical entrapment of Cordelia's body and hence the instrument of her voice.

I question the extent to which Luckyj's insight that Lear's idealistic fantasy of rapturous banishment and imprisonment with his daughter is thwarted and refused by Cordelia's feminine silence (Luckyj p.48). As much as her silence can play on early modern culture's paradoxical view of silence to assert a feminine subjectivity that defies definition, Lear's instruction to 'Wipe thine eyes' (5.3.23) can signify Cordelia's pity as not directed toward them but for him and herself individually. She expresses a painful acknowledgment and awareness of the dissolution of female speech under the feminine coded sign of tears and emotion. Overall, Cordelia's demise here, in terms of her vocal degradation in preparation for physical elimination, is reconfigured primarily as a part of Lear's spiritual evolution, as punishment for his inability to address her independence.

Cordelia's body, together with the bodies of her sisters Goneril and Regan, is visible to the audience on stage, implying not just the collapse of the female voice as it relates to the heroine, but a dismantling of the female voice as it relates to all feminine expressions. Ironically, it is at the moment of death that Cordelia's presence is truly realized as valuable, and her body is only registered once it is returned to the stage by the paternal authority of Lear (Holahan p.425). Cordelia's silence in death is eerie in the sense that it is beyond Lear's domination and thus patriarchal appropriation. Lear pitifully strives to hear the voice of his daughter; this is only however once she is dead and thus ironically voiceless. Lear's carrying of Cordelia onto the stage resembles a bridegroom carrying his bride across the threshold (Adelman p.126), reflecting a final integration of the female body, and her voice, into the patriarchal institution of marriage as promised in the first scene of the play. I however would further contend that this image inverts the early pieta staging in Act 4 Scene 7, ironically demonstrating what an enablement of Lear's "kind nursery" would be. In cradling her body, he assumes the maternal position he aimed to foist on her (Cox p.156). The play illustrates the horror and unnaturalness that emerges from the father outliving his child, and thus the potential awfulness that derives from the father having control over the definition of the female body and voice. There is a particular condemnation here of Lear's hypocrisy, in that Lear abandoned and exiled Cordelia especially because of her voice. Yet now he celebrates what enraged him most, only when that female voice has been taken from his patriarchal grasp.

The staging of Cordelia's body however does little to counter the masculine language which articulates it. In associating Cordelia's body with the material property of land, in which she is 'dead as earth' (5.3.259), paired with the masculine reinterpretation

of her voice as 'ever soft/ Gentle and low, an excellent thing in a woman' (5.3.270-1), her capacity for expression is rendered under patriarchal ownership. Cordelia's death is unsettling in the way that she is suspended in an ambiguous space between the boundaries of life and death (Berry p.5). That the audience, as well as the characters, cannot perceive what Lear believes himself to see on Cordelia's lips, as what he stares at now is a female corpse, rendering the female body and voice as a spectacle of unknowable nothing. It is only through this dead silence that Cordelia seemingly redeems her fault in Lear's eyes, where in saying 'nothing', the female voice is approved by patriarchal authority. Shakespeare in this manner illustrates how, as claimed by Phillipa Berry, the female body functions as the tool through which the masculine eye of judgment is "opened" (Berry p.85).

Lear, however, in examining his daughter's body is keen to demonstrate any signs of an unseeable voice, speech, or "breath." His concern is less *what* she says and more *that* she says anything at all. This leads him to die acknowledging something deliberate but unnamed about Cordelia (Holahan p.412). In particular, the pause before the latter question – 'What is't thou say'st?' (5.3.270), extends the caesura to acknowledge Cordelia's silence. Shakespeare here highlights how Cordelia's inability to speak which was once a source of anger is now one of anguish to Lear, and yet he cannot listen to her as she is dead. Critics like Holahan note that Lear develops, not solely through his internal self-reflection, but rather through his responsive observation and emulation of Cordelia's soft voice. Lear here makes an appeal for affection that requests only the softest form of speech, a speech he eventually must repeat himself (Holahan p.407-12).

I counter with the fact that Lear fails to recognize the inadequacy of patriarchal language for the female voice. The absence of irony in his assertion that her female voice embodied the most ideal feminine qualities, as 'gentle', 'low' and 'excellent', actively erases Cordelia's own practical, pragmatic language about the 'bond' between a woman and her paternal authority. In being rendered speechless, Cordelia, and the female voice altogether, are dispossessed of the power to assign her own meanings, as she becomes a collection of signs directed by the patriarchal gaze. The formation of the ideal woman, whom Lear defines as his favourite daughter, is thus reliant upon the demise of the female heroine, the suffocating conditions of which ensure that no contradictory voice can challenge the patriarchal nostalgic dream. Lear's sentimentalization of Cordelia as a model of womanhood enables him to acquire a reestablishment of machismo. Shakespeare therefore encourages the audience to view Cordelia's corpse, her state of inexpression, as a prop for Lear's distress (Adelman p.127), and in a further sense a theatrical property for Lear's performance of authority (Rutter p.5). Having destroyed Cordelia's subjectivity, Lear, and Shakespeare, assume even her own death from her authority. The mode of Cordelia's demise establishes a sort of metaphoric protest, in that Cordelia's breath is strangled from her, resulting in her rebellious voice becoming smothered in her throat.

Lear's final invocation involving a surrender to a loss of speech or intelligibility only serves to highlight how Cordelia never even receives the chance to speak, her voice becoming subsumed by her father's words that are not her own. He only reattributes

himself as Holahan claims, by 'binding a constant of her character to his own' (Holahan p.427). Lear's verbal deterioration in death, 'O, o, o, o' (5.3.307) signals a loss of language in which speech is utterly destroyed and erased by despair and anguish. Shakespeare reflects here how Cordelia's own off-stage expressions of distress and inequity are now forever occupied by another bearer. Following his non-verbal exclamation, Lear must coax Cordelia into language, the realm in which Lear is authority, and address the reality of her demise and his impassioned need for her life (Holahan p.425). However, this does not necessarily mean that the patriarchal voice triumphs in the end. Lear's speechless cry (5.3.255, 308) situates him by the end of play in the domain of silence. The play positions Lear's eventual relinquishment of language as predicated on his understanding that he 'did her [Cordelia] wrong' (1.5.24). Shakespeare echoes Stanley Cavell's notion that Cordelia's demise ensures absolute justice in that 'every falsehood, every refusal of acknowledgment will be tracked down' (Hamamra p.2, p.38). In this context, Cordelia's demise embodies the success of silence over speech. In inverting the notion that male identity is determined through the exclusion of the feminine, Lear, as the embodiment of the patriarchal voice from the start of the play, submits himself to Cordelia's feminine silence. In addition, Caroline Rutter posits that Cordelia's corpse estranges Lear's performance by confronting the agony and misery Lear strives to impose on it. The play establishes the theatrical site of the women's demise as a subversive rather than conforming site, for with her text exhausted, she has 'nothing to act yet everything to play for' (Rutter p.5). As much as the patriarchal characters and male authors and critics attempt to assign her body and voice a straightforward meaning, Cordelia remains obstinately illegible of a single interpretation or reading (Rutter p.14). Thus, Cordelia remaining a potential 'mystery even in her death' (Berry p.166) can be empowering rather than disheartening.

In spite of the bleakness of the final scene, I argue that Lear's behaviour here not only acts as an affirmation of Edgar but more importantly Cordelia's idea that language, as coded and controlled by patriarchal authority, can never authentically convey one's suffering, especially when it relates to the stifling of the female voice through the means of the body. Thus, Lear's renouncement of language altogether when it is clear that he occupies a bestial world, a world in which 'a dog, a horse, a rat have a life' (5.3.305), can be read as representative of an animalistic patriarchal society that is responsible for the unjust silencing and death of a blameless woman and daughter. The ceaseless repetition of the term 'Never, never, never, never, never, never' (5.3.306) acts as a validation and finalization of 'Nothing', the concept that Cordelia introduced from the beginning of the play. Accordingly, the notion of oblivion and the nihilistic tone of the play are accomplished through an acknowledgment of the truth and foresight located in female expression. Shakespeare highlights how the assigned 'nothing' that is female speech becomes the 'nothing' of the deceased female body under patriarchal control.

However, this radical potential is to an extent undercut by Lear's final impulsive repetition for the male viewer, both character and audience member, to 'Look', to adhere to his fantastical vision:

LEAR: Do you see this? Look on her. Look, her lips.
Look there, look there (5.3.308).

The audience must employ the device of sight, coded here as masculine, to reinscribe meaning to the female body, to determine the feminine voice in her definitive passive state under the male dominant order. His assertion plays on the miraculous hope and potential for resurrection, meta-theatrically relying on the audience's knowledge that the actor who plays Cordelia is alive and thus could rise any moment. The audience is demanded to view what does not exist, in which the patriarchal rhetoric is intensely focused on "her", for this is and is not Cordelia. Her character now appears only in an actor's body's mimicry of a past life – a striking union of death and theatrical illusion' (Holahan p.412). In the case of Cordelia, the efforts by her father to inscribe her as a resurrected body, can be read, as an attempt by patriarchal authority to ensure that the female body can act as representative of a purified sexuality, for femininity to vindicate and save a corrupted masculinity (Aughterson and Ferguson p.228). Lear concludes in a fervour of "seeing", yearning for female speech, and yet acquiring 'nothing'. An alternative reading of the breathing of the dead female body by Hamamra implies that rebellious viewpoints on vocal agency can arise (Hamamra p.2). I contest this in that the male authority's liberation from blindness and capacity for imagination only occurs through the conditions of female suffering. Cordelia's demise by hanging therefore gestures toward a reading of Lear's silencing of her speech reaching its culmination, in order for her to assemble into his fantasy. She encompasses the heart or 'cor' that forms the first part of her name, originating from the Latin word of the same meaning (Van Domelen p.133), that Lear attempts to master and thus must eventually suffocate in order to maintain authority over. For Lear, as representative of patriarchal authority, the woman's demise and silence enable him to access and authorize emotional expression and vulnerability. For Cordelia, the female subject, death arrives as punishment for her attempts to create a language of their own free from externalized and internalized linguistic violence, and hence male dominance.

Yet were it not for her example of verbal integrity in the very first scene of the play, the conclusion that the characters assert to the audience as a final sense of meaning amidst the bleakness, that we as individuals should 'Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say' (5.3.323), would never have occurred. The play underscores the radical power of the female voice and speech to restore emotionality and the heart to the English language. Meanwhile, it highlights, as Cox asserts, the false opposition between honesty and propriety, emotion, and obedience (Cox p.147). I argue, like Holahan, that death may end the female body but that there are other areas for her voice to surface (Holahan p.426). The play's conclusion is dependent on the allure and potential of re-establishing a "natural" order, adhering to the traditions of the Shakespearean tragedy in which there is the possibility of re-establishment of sovereignty and hence closure. However, like in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, the audience is at least made to pause and reflect on how this resolution is ensured by the absence of women from futurity (Cox p.157). Overall, although Cordelia is continually in danger of being perverted or misrepresented

by Lear, Shakespeare's ending implies that it is the truth of the heart, and hence the female voice, that the world of the play, and in turn the Renaissance world outside of it, needs.

Conclusion

Through compounding the world under her own mode of expression and feeling, including the medium of silence and reappropriation, Cordelia is able to unearth a real sense and practice of sincerity separate from the violent influence of patriarchal language. Her clarity demonstrates a hope for women to exist away from a world that has restrained and manipulated their bodies under the guise of establishing order and "coherence." Shakespeare's exploration of female silencing acts as a commentary on how language's adherence to coherence, rationality, and reason, enables masculine authorities to impose their meanings onto female experiences. The female body functions as the scapegoat, a site of visibility and uncertainty. If speech is perceived as a distinctively human apparatus that enables individual subjectivity to be perceived by others, and society itself to exist, then silence can become a form of menacing rebellion for marginalized subjects such as women. While silence can make women more susceptible than men, it renders Lear's projection of obedience onto the female body futilely. The female voice exists as a resistant material beyond language and thus beyond bodily categorization by male authority. Faced with irrational, patriarchal linguistic violence, Cordelia strives to maintain herself and yet transitions beyond the conventional limits of speech expected of the female subject. She does so by employing both silence and speech, absence and presence as a resistance against immoral and excessive deployment of authority. Instead of being unaffectionate, inactive, or even unrealistic, Cordelia's role in her farcical but dangerous courts exemplifies the significance of the female voice in preserving and balancing affection and duty beyond personal ambition. Her belief in sincerity and love is not simply destroyed but rather reoriented, as she is opposed by the coercive powers of paternal commands, driven by the wider political problems that she is excluded from knowledge of.

Shakespeare's tragedies are radical in that they do not land on a unitary or single idea of character but rather illustrate how character itself can be assembled and disassembled (Holahan p.419). Thus, the female voice cannot be fully destroyed but rather signified and rearticulated through multiple apparatuses, including the ventriloquising of other transgressive supporting characters. It is not entirely possible to determine whether Shakespeare is empathetic to an extent to Cordelia's female voice and preservation of her integrity. However, his tragedy presents the potential for a female mode of expression: one of reappropriation, punning, and of course silence through direct refusal and death, as separate from patriarchal verbal control. The play therefore establishes a harsh, condemning critique of the inescapable issue that is the gendered violence inherent in the English language, at least, in Shakespeare's time. His play positions the female voice and viewpoint as one that speaks from outside the male framework of reference. Through its alternative modes that appear illegible to the

patriarchal ear, the female voice can expose the multiple corruptions at place in civilization, and the arbitrary nature of "reality" and "reason" that is as malleable as language itself.

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