

‘She throws forth Tarquin’s name’: Some Sixteenth-Century Traditions of ἄπτερος and the Idea of Voice in Shakespeare’s Poetics

Tetsuro Shimizu

Introduction

The difficulty of representing the female voice has often served as an important source of poetic imagination, and Shakespeare’s case was no exception. Viola, the heroine of *Twelfth Night* and now disguised as a eunuch, tells her master a story about ‘a daughter’ whom her father had:

She never told her love,
But let concealment like a worm i’th’bud
Feed on her damask cheek. She pined in thought,
And with a green and yellow melancholy
She sat like Patience on a monument,
Smiling at grief.

(*Twelfth Night*, 2.4.106-11)¹

What is paradoxical here is the fact that, talking about the taciturnity of his/her father’s daughter, Viola is in fact eloquent enough to gracefully represent *her own* suppressed love. One may argue that the reason Viola can manage her language skillfully at that moment is mainly because she is assuming a man’s position. She will be able to talk, however, no matter which sex she may take up. The important question is, rather, whether others listen to her or not. As for Orsino, he does listen to her speech carefully although he does not realize her hidden sex or her noble identity. Many heroines of Shakespearean plays, in fact, do speak excellently for themselves.

The current essay will examine both dialogic and non-dialogic structures of women’s speech as represented in Shakespeare’s works and some of their classical models.

1

The myth of Procne and Philomela is referred to frequently by Shakespeare and his contemporaries. In *Titus Andronicus*, the rape of Lavinia is committed by two villains who explicitly refer to the Ovidian myth of Philomela as a classical precedent of their wrongdoing. To make the matter more brutal, they cut off both her hands as well as her tongue after their

sexual assault on her body. The tongue is a metonym for speech while the hand is that for writing or weaving. What is implied and ironically emphasized here by such theatrical representation is the fact that women can indeed speak, weave and write unless violence and cruelty are inflicted on them. The myth of depriving women of their speech is predicated on the fact that they have language to speak.

When she encounters Tamora and her illicit lover Aaron in the woods, Lavinia proves talkative, and even flippant, until she is accused by Tamora and is dragged off to be raped by her two sons:

And being intercepted in your sport,
Great reason that my noble lord be rated
For sauciness. I pray you, let us hence,
And let her joy her raven-coloured love;
This valley fits the purpose passing well. (*Titus Andronicus*, 2.3.80-84)

And her uncle Marcus, who has found and brought to Titus the raped and mutilated niece, laments:

O that delightful engine of her thoughts
That blabbed them with such pleasing eloquence
Is torn from forth that pretty hollow cage (3.1.82-84)²

Lavinia, then, *was* eloquent.

If rape is metaphorically defined as a sort of physical violence that one inflicts on a woman thereby depriving her of the power to speak, or eloquence, another spectacular victim of rape in this play is Tamora, a female Marlovian villain. In this metaphorical sense, Tamora is raped by Titus twice in the play. First in Act I, as the captive queen of the Goths, she appeals to Titus, asking him to save the life of her eldest son, who is about to be killed as a sacrifice for the dead. Tamora's appeal is rejected, and her son – a metonymy for her flesh – is massacred in ceremonial cruelty. Then in the last banquet scene in Act V, Tamora is forced by trickery to eat her own sons' flesh that has been baked in a pie; she is then herself killed and therewith finally deprived of her once glaringly eloquent speech by the vengeful patriarch Titus.

Why there they are, both bakèd in this pie,
Whereof their mother daintily hath fed,
Eating the flesh that she herself hath bred.
'Tis true, 'tis true, witness my knife's sharp point.
He stabs the empress (5.3.59-62)

In this revenge play written by the young poet (probably with some collaborator), linguistic and meta-poetic interest in the issues of eloquence and the loss of it is evident.

The idea of an eloquent voice that is to be destroyed with violence may be the essence of the Philomela myth, and so is it in Shakespeare's source, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Book VI. Even after she is raped, Philomela dares to speak powerfully enough to terrify the perpetrator Tereus:

si tamen haec superi cernunt, si numina divum
sunt aliquid, si non perierunt omnia mecum,
quandocumque mihi poenas dabis! ipsa pudore
proiecto tua facta loquar: si copia detur,
in populos veniam; si silvis clausa tenebor,
inplebo silvas et conscia saxa movebo;
audiet haec aether et si deus ullus in illo est! (Metamorphoses, VI.542-48)
[If those who dwell on high see these things, nay, if there are any gods at all,
if all things have not perished with me, sooner or later you shall pay dearly
for this deed. I will myself cast shame aside and proclaim what you have done.
If I should have the chance, I would go where people throng; if I am
kept shut up in these woods, I will fill the woods with my story and move the
rocks to sympathise. The air of heaven shall hear it, and, if there is any god in
heaven, he shall hear it too.']*³

Following this speech, her tongue is cut off by the tyrant who is frightened of her cry.

In the tradition that is transmitted through Ovid to 16th-century poets, women's eloquent voice is quite problematic.

2

Shakespeare's narrative poem *The Rape of Lucrece* is also a full-length study on the loss and the recovery of speech. Making up her mind to commit suicide, Lucrece refers to her "breath" that has been made to stop by the rapist Tarquin:

'Yet die I not, till my Collatine
Have heard the cause of my untimely death,
That he may vow, in that sad hour of mine,
Revenge on him that made me stop my breath.
My stained blood to Tarquin I'll bequeath,
Which by him tainted shall for him be spent,
And his due writ in my testament. (Lucrece, 1177-83)

Although she thinks that she has lost her voice because of Tarquin's violence, Lucrece is in fact one of the heroines who gets most lines in Shakespeare's works. She talks a lot in spite of the loss of her voice, although it is almost only to the reader.

Lucrece speaks also for other people who cannot speak for themselves. In the long *ekphrasis* concerning a huge painting that depicts the scenes of the Fall of Troy, she sympathizes with Hecuba:

On this sad shadow Lucrece spends her eyes,
And shapes her sorrow to the beldam's woes,
Who nothing wants to answer her but cries,
And bitter words to ban her cruel foes:
The painter was no god to lend her those;
And therefore Lucrece swears he did wrong,
To give her so much grief and not a tongue.

'Poor instrument,' quoth she, 'without a sound,
I'll tune thy woes with my lamenting tongue,
And drop sweet balm in Priam's painted wound,
And rail on Pyrrhus that hath done him wrong,
And with my tears quench Troy that burns so long,

(1457-68)

With respect to the issue of her voice, however, the most serious problem seems to take place when she finally meets her husband Collatine, and tries to tell him what she has suffered:

Here with a sigh as if her heart would break,
She throws forth Tarquin's name: 'He, he,' she says,
But more than 'he' her poor tongue could not speak;
Till after many accents and delays,
Untimely breathings, sick and short assays,
She utters this: 'He, he, fair lords, 'tis he,
That guides this hand to give this wound to me.'

(1716-22)

In contrast to the long narrative in which she has been talking garrulously to various characters - Night, Opportunity, Time, her hand, the sun, Philomel, painted Hecuba, and the maid -, Lucrece, here, fails to pronounce explicitly the name of the perpetrator. 'He' is the only word that she could speak, so it is not certain whether any of her husband Collatine, her father Lucretius, the 'prudent' Brutus or other Roman citizens is able to hear her voice or how they can know that the rapist is Tarquin. Their decision to be revenged on the latter may be more political than sympathetic.

And what is more difficult to define is the phrase 'throws forth Tarquine's name' on the

preceding line. What 'throws forth' means here is quite ambiguous. Does it mean that, although Lucrece pronounces the name, it does not reach the expected listeners? Or the words that she intends to convey to them just fly away and disintegrate? This reminds us somewhat of the famous Homeric phrases ἔπεα πτερόεντα (winged words) and ἄπερος μῦθος (wingless speech), but these will be discussed in a later section. Before turning to Homeric traditions, we should consider Shakespeare's direct sources.

The main classical sources of Shakespeare's *Lucrece* are known to be Ovid's *Fasti*, Book II and Livy's *History of Rome*, Book I. With respect to the issue of voice, the former's influence on Shakespeare seems more significant than the latter's. In Ovid, Collatine's chaste wife Lucrece is introduced as having fine, modest voice:

lumen ad exiguum famulae data pensa trahebant,

inter quas tenui sic ait illa sono:

'mittenda est domino (nunc, nunc properate, puellae!)

quam primum nostra facta lacerna manu.

(*Fasti* 2.743-46)

[By a dim light the handmaids were spinning their allotted stints of yarn. Amongst them the lady speaks in modest accents: 'Haste ye now, haste, my girls! The cloak our hands have wrought must to your master be instantly dispatched.]⁴

When she is threatened by Tarquin with words and a sword in her bed chamber, she loses her voice:

utque torum pressit, 'ferrum, Lucretia, mecum est.

natus' ait 'regis Tarquiniusque loquor!'

illa nihil : neque enim vocem viresque loquendi

aut aliquid toto pectore mentis habet,

(2.795-98)

[And when he touched the bed, 'The steel is in my hand, Lucretia,' says he, 'I that speak am the king's son and Tarquin.' She answers never a word, because voice, or power of speech, or thought itself she does not have in her breast.]

And finally before her husband and her father, she finds it extremely difficult to tell the truth of her suffering:

illa diu reticet pudibundaque celat amictu

ora : fluunt lacrimae more perennis aquae.

hinc pater, hinc coniunx lacrimas solantur et orant,

indicet, et caeco flentque paventque metu.

ter conata loqui ter destitit, ausaque quarto

non oculos ideo sustulit illa suos.

'hoc quoque Tarquinio debebimus? eloquar,' inquit,

'eloquar infelix dedecus ipsa meum?'

quaeque potest, narrat. restabant ultima : flevit,

et matronales erubere genae.

(2.819-28)

[She keeps silent for a long time, and for shame hides her face in her robe : her tears flow like a running stream. On this side and on that her father and her spouse soothe her grief and pray her to tell, and in blind fear they weep and quake. Having attempted thrice to speak, thrice she gives over, and when the fourth time she summons up her courage she does not for that lift up her eyes. 'Must we owe this too to Tarquin? Must I utter,' says she, 'must I utter, woe's me, my own discredit?' And what she can she tells. The end remained unsaid, she wept, and matron cheeks blushed.]

Both the eloquence that she loses and her inability to speak are underscored by Ovid, and then further extended by 16th-century poets.

3

Along with the difficulty with pronouncing one's voice that we have overviewed in the examples above, the existence of dialogic relations between the speaker and her/his listeners becomes poetically a critical issue as well. Something similar to the latter is already typically seen in the interpretative tradition of Homer's formulaic phrases *ἔπεα πτερόεντα* (usually translated as 'winged words') and *ἄπτερος ... μῦθος* ('wingless words'?). The former is one of the most famous Homeric formulae, and means the sort of speech that flies from the speaker to the targeted listener and is received by the latter. According to Steve Reece's study on these formulae, it occurs '124 times in Homer, distributed evenly over the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* with respect both to the number of occurrences (61× and 63×) and to the variety of the verse's avatars.'⁵

On the other hand, the latter's meaning is uncertain. As Reece indicates:

The formula occurs four times in Homer, all in the latter portion of the *Odyssey*. In each instance a male character (Telemachus or Eumaeus) has just given a set of instructions to a female character (Penelope or Eurycleia), who does not answer but immediately carries out the instructions: Telemachus instructs Penelope to bathe and clothe herself, and then go to the upper room with the servant women and pray to the gods (17.46-56); Telemachus instructs Eurycleia to shut the servant women out while he and the newly arrived stranger remove the arms from the hall (19.16-28); Eumaeus instructs Eurycleia to lock the doors of the hall and keep the women out (21.381-85); Telemachus instructs Eurycleia to come back into the hall and hear the words of his father (22.395-97).⁶

Eurycleia is Odysseus' nurse, and Eumaeus is a swineherd who is loyal to his master Odysseus.

In each example above, it is contextually apparent that the listener (Penelope or Eurycleia) understands and performs the instruction faithfully, but the meaning of the phrase ἄπτερος … μῦθος itself remains ambiguous.

The following is the text in Greek of the first example mentioned by Reece:

Τὴν δ’ αὖ Τηλέμαχος πεπνυμένος ἀντίον ἠῦδα·
“μῆτερ ἐμή, μή μοι γόον ὄρνυθι μηδὲ μοι ἦτορ
ἐν στήθεσσιν ὄρινε φυγόντι περ αἰπὺν ὄλεθρον·
ἀλλ’ ὕδρην αμῆνη, καθαρὰ χροὶ εἵμαθ’ ἐλοῦσα,
εἰς ὑπερῷ’ ἀναβάσα σὺν ἀμφιπόλοισι γυναιξίν
εὔχεο πᾶσι θεοῖσι τεληέσσας ἑκατόμβας
ῥέξειν, αἶ κέ ποθι Ζεὺς ἀντιτα ἔργα τελέσσει.
αὐτὰρ ἐγὼν ἀγορήν ἐσελεύσομαι, ὄφρα καλέσσω
ξεῖνον, ὅτις μοι κεῖθεν ἄμ’ ἔσπετο δεῦρο κιόντι.
τὸν μὲν ἐγὼ προὔπεμψα σὺν ἀντιθεοῖς ἐτάροισι,
Πείραλον δὲ μιν ἠνώγεα προτὶ οἶκον ἄγοντα
ἐνδουκέως φιλέειν καὶ τιέμεν, εἰς ὃ κεν ἔλθω.”
ὧς ἄρ’ ἐφώνησεν, τῆ δ’ ἄπτερος ἔπλετο μῦθος.
ἠ δ’ ὕδρην αμῆνη, καθαρὰ χροὶ εἵμαθ’ ἐλοῦσα,
εὔχετο πᾶσι θεοῖσι τεληέσσας ἑκατόμβας
ῥέξειν, αἶ κέ ποθι Ζεὺς ἀντιτα ἔργα τελέσσει. (Odyssey 17. 45-59)⁷

[Then wise Telemachus answered her: ‘My mother, do not make me weep, nor rouse the heart in my breast at having barely escaped utter destruction. No; bathe yourself, and take clean clothes for your body, and then, going to your upper chamber with your handmaids, vow to all the gods that you will offer perfect hecatombs, in the hope that Zeus may some day bring deeds of requital to pass. But I will go to the place of assembly that I may invite to our house a stranger who came with me from Pylos on my way here. Him I sent forward with my god-like comrades, and I told Peiraeus to take him home and give him kindly welcome, and show honour until I should come.’ So he spoke, but her word remained unwinged. Then she bathed, and took clean clothes for her body, and vowed to all the gods that she would offer perfect hecatombs, in the hope that Zeus would some day bring deeds of requital to pass.]⁸

According to Reece,

Etymologically the epithet ἄπτερος, assuming it contains an alpha-privative prefix, should mean the opposite of πτερόεις, and this is the way interpreters and translators have often rendered the phrase: that is, the word was for her ‘without a wing.’ Contextually, however, the epithet ἄπτερος seems to mean the same thing as πτερόεις: in each of the four passages

the words have flown quickly from speaker to hearer, who appears to understand them perfectly and then proceeds to obey them. Simply put, as exegetes we are in the embarrassing position of having two etymologically *opposite* epithets – ἄπτερος and πτερόεις – appear to mean contextually *the same thing*. There have, of course, been many attempts throughout the centuries of Homeric scholarship to solve this dilemma.⁹

After surveying various scholarly attempts to solve this question, Reece suggests returning to Milman Parry’s now classic oral-formulaic theory,¹⁰ rather than proposing any explicit conclusion:

[T]he formula [of ἔπεα πτερόεντα προσηύδα] was used because it was a convenience of verse composition, not because it had any particular meaning beyond ‘he said.’ […] The formula would not have been readily analyzed by the pre-Homeric Greek epic bards and their audiences as a combination of two distinct words: a noun in the neuter, accusative, plural followed by an adjective agreeing with it in gender, case, and number. They would not have been interested in breaking down the formula any further, or have felt any need to do so, nor would they have been particularly alert to its etymological origins.¹¹

In other words, formulaic phrases like ἔπεα πτερόεντα and ἄπτερος ἔπλετο μῦθος are used for the convenience of oral bards rather than for their exact meanings.

What is particularly interesting in this argument to us students of early modern poetry is the fact that the meaning of ἄπτερος ἔπλετο μῦθος is unstable, and therefore is always open to readers’ various interpretations. It points to how certain interpretations or translations of the epic formula reflect the translator’s and certain readers’ social and cultural backgrounds. So how were these formulae interpreted and translated by the late 16th-century classicists and translators?

Let us, for example, have a look at the Latin translation of the relevant line in the 1574 edition of the *Odysseia* that was printed in Eustache Vignon’s printing house in Geneva. Vignon was the successor of Jean Crespin, and their editions of classical Greek literature were aimed to be sold to university students and, in fact, circulated widely. This *Odysseia* is a bilingual edition in which a Latin translation was printed alongside the Greek text on the opposite pages.¹²

ὡς ἄρ’ ἐφώνησεν, τῆ δ’ ἄπτερος ἔπλετο μῦθος. (17.56)

Sic loquutus est. huic autem firmum fuit verbum.

[Thus he said. As for her, speech was certain.]

One can translate ἄπτερος as ‘certain, firm’ (*firmum*) either by taking ἄ- as an intensive or by interpreting that ‘wingless’ speech is firm because it does not fly away or go askew. We should also note here uncertainty about to whom that speech (*verbum*) belongs. Is it Penelope’s or Telemachus’? The translation cleverly keeps such uncertainties about the meaning of Homer’s formulaic phrase. The meaning of this Homeric formula almost entirely depends on its context,

that is, the dialogue between Telemachus and his mother.

Something similar to this is taking place in Lucretia's/Lucrece's final speech, which is ambiguous both in Ovid and Shakespeare:

quaeque potest, narrat. restabant ultima : flevit, (*Fasti*, 2.827)
[And what she can she tells. The end remained unsaid: she wept,]

She throws forth Tarquin's name: 'He, he,' she says,
But more than 'he' her poor tongue could not speak; (*Lucrece*, 1717f.)

Only the dialogic contexts in which Lucretia/Lucrece is involved enable us to assume what 'quae potest' and 'he' signify.

4

Returning to Shakespeare's texts, let us reconsider the way our poet represents women's speech. Since Lucrece is resolute about killing herself, her speech should be firm (*firmum* / ἄπτερος) as in the cases of Homer's Penelope or Eurycleia, but how it is interpreted is another question. The meaning of the speech of these women entirely depends on the context. In Lucrece's case, it depends on the structure of dialogues that may or may not take place between Lucrece and her audience (her husband, her father and Roman citizens). If the only word she can actually pronounce is 'He,' how her speech is interpreted by her interlocutors is quite arbitrary.

In fact, Brutus, who has disguised his 'deep policy' (1815) by behaving like a fool, plucks 'the knife from Lucrece's side' (1807) and immediately calls for 'Tarquin's everlasting banishment' (1855) from Rome. It sounds as if her imperfect speech or 'testament' is politically appropriated.

Shakespeare is probably following the tradition of reading Homeric ἄπτερος ... μῦθος as *firmum verbum*, as we have seen above in the example of the 1572 Genevan bilingual edition of the *Odyssey*. He is, however, not content in representing women's voice simply as firm and tacit. For example, in sonnet 130 the poet says he likes to 'hear' his mistress 'speak' in the crucial line that begins the third quatrain after dismissing every stereotype of beauty in the Petrarchan tradition in the first and second quatrains:

I love to hear her speak, yet well I know
That music hath a far more pleasing sound;
I grant I never saw a goddess go –
My mistress when she walks treads on the ground.
And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare
As any she belied with false compare. (Sonnet 130.9-14)

She *speaks* and *walks firmly* ‘on the ground,’ and the poet willingly listens to her, so that they can engage in honest and practical conversations confidently using the language of human beings.

Conclusion

The current essay has taken examples solely from scenes and lines in which women are involved. In Shakespeare’s poetics, however, the gender of the speaker may not count so much as the issue of language itself. The situation in which one cannot speak properly or engage in intimate dialogues or conversations functions ironically for this poet as a profound source of his inspiration, just like *le vide papier que la blancheur défend* for Stéphane Mallarmé.¹³ As we have seen in some tradition of the Homeric formulae ἔπεα πτερόεντα προσηύδα and ἄπτερος ἔπλετο μῦθος, isolated speech means nothing in itself. Similar things can be said about Shakespeare’s idea of language. Dialogic structures are essential for his poetics. Many attempts and failures to represent women’s voices in his works are in fact meta-poetic, and his true concern seems to be his own imagination, or to put it more precisely, his power to represent human beings and their society by means of poetic art.

Words cannot stand alone.¹⁴

Note

- 1 Shakespeare’s texts are taken from The New Cambridge Shakespeare series.
- 2 All the underlined sections in the passages quoted in the current article are my emphases.
- 3 The text of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* is taken from the Loeb Classical Library edition. English translation is adapted from F. J. Miller’s translation of the same edition.
- 4 The text of Ovid’s *Fasti* is taken from The Loeb Classical Library edition. The English translation is adapted from that of the same edition.
- 5 Steve Reece, ‘Homer’s Winged and Wingless Words: ΠΤΕΡΟΕΙΣ / ΑΠΤΕΡΟΣ,’ *Classical Philology* 104 (2009), p. 261.
- 6 Reece, pp.264-65.
- 7 The Greek text of the *Odyssey* is taken from the Internet Sacred Text Archive.
- 8 English translation is adapted from The Loeb Classical Library edition.
- 9 Reece, p.265.
- 10 Cf. Adam Parry, ed. *The Making of Homeric Verse: The Collected Papers of Milman Parry* (Oxford University Press, 1971).
- 11 Reece, pp.274-75.
- 12 For the Greek-Latin bilingual edition of the *Odyssey* see Tetsuro Shimizu, ‘Making “blind Homer sing to me”: 16th-Century Student Editions of Greek Poems and Marlowe’s Art of Imitation,’ *Shakespeare Studies*, Vol. 50 (2012) , pp.16-36.
- 13 Mallarmé, ‘Brise marine,’ 1.7.
- 14 The author is grateful to Andrew Rayment, Associate Professor at Chiba University, who kindly

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