

*The Politics of the Female Voice**The Lady shall say her mind freely**Hamlet* 2.2.282

In the final act of Shakespeare's *Othello*, Emilia defies Iago's attempts to silence her by insisting on exposing his "odious damned lie." "I will not charm my tongue; I am bound to speak," she tells him (5.2.179, 183).¹ Echoing Iago's own disingenuous claim that he is "bound" to Othello by duty (3.3.135, 197), Emilia first articulates her right to speak in terms of the moral and political obligations implicitly violated by her husband. Bound to her conscience, her mistress, and the state, she accordingly requests permission from the authorities to use public language (5.2.194). Yet as the scene proceeds and Emilia recognizes the magnitude of Iago's lie, she increasingly flouts such deference. At his final attempt to silence her, she cries (in the Folio): "No, I will speak as liberal as the north; / Let heaven, and men, and devils, let them all, / All, all cry shame against me, yet I'll speak" (218–20). A "liberal counsellor" indeed (2.1.160), Emilia chooses speech that is "unrestrained by prudence or decorum" (OED 3a). Her image of the "angry northern wind" (*Titus Andronicus* 4.1.104) not only picks up Desdemona's "storm of fortunes" and imitates "the wind [that] does speak aloud" during the tempest (2.1.5), but also carries hints of Ezekiel's prophetic vision of "a whirlwinde [that] came out of the North" to destroy Jerusalem (Ezek. 1.4).² Unlike the ensign's wife in the source who is merely a witness to and narrator of the play's events, Emilia and her impassioned voice in this scene are entirely Shakespeare's invention. Transformed from a submissive wife who "has no speech" earlier in the play (2.1.103), Emilia becomes more than simply a disobedient woman who speaks out against her erring husband. Unlike virtuous male servants such as *King Lear*'s Kent, whose plain-speaking "duty" to correct his master's "folly" aims to buttress the "authority" of a king he continues to serve (*Lear* 1.1.144, 147; 1.4.27),³ Emilia turns not only on

the men she calls “lord” (Othello and Iago), but also on *all* men in authority who would inhibit her speech, staking her life and her soul on “speak[ing] true” (*Othello* 5.2.248). It may be that, as Michael Neill claims, “Emilia’s denunciation of husbandly oppression is in many ways the equivalent of Iago’s denunciation of the iniquity of masters and the humiliations of service,” but Emilia’s denunciation – unlike Iago’s – is amply justified by the play’s events and openly proclaimed in the public sphere.⁴ Doubly transgressive for a woman who – according to early modern conduct books – should be “never loud,” (2.1.146), Emilia’s “liberal” speech associates the female voice with questions of political freedom in a tragedy usually considered “domestic.”

Used nineteen times in *Othello*, the word “free” is contested from the beginning of the play. On the one hand, Othello’s reference to his “unhoused free condition” signals his freedom from “circumscription” (1.2.26–27) – from marriage and perhaps also from captivity (1.3.137). On the other, for Brabantio his daughter’s marriage should *not* have “passage free” (1.2.98); his fearful imagining of her as a free agent – as “half the wooer” – leads him to insist regressively on her “obedience” (1.3.174, 178). Yet in contrast to the authoritarianism that he himself recognizes as tantamount to a “tyranny” that would tempt him to enslave or “hang clogs on” a child (1.3.195–96), Desdemona speaks the language of contract and consent. She pleads for “a charter” from the duke (1.3.242) – a word that meant “granting privileges to, or recognizing rights of, the people” (OED 1a) and in England carried overtones of the Great Charter that guaranteed the subject’s fundamental liberties. In her marriage, Desdemona lays claim to the “liberties” afforded by the charter, using her “free speech” to intervene with her husband on Cassio’s behalf (3.4.123). As Desdemona’s chosen partner, Othello likewise displays his “free and open nature” (1.3.381) in his commitment both “to be free and bounteous to her mind” (1.3.261) and to license her speech. “Let her speak of me before her father,” he insists; “let her witness it” (1.3.116, 169). Indeed, before Othello falls into Iago’s trap, he celebrates his wife as “free of speech,” a quality compatible with “virtue” (3.3.187–88). Mark Matheson argues that the women’s freedom of speech in *Othello* is associated with the republican, anti-absolutist values of Venice.⁵ Yet because, as Andrew Hadfield provocatively notes, “none of the leading men are Venetian, only the women,” it is the *women* who articulate the principles of freedom that culminate in Emilia’s searing “liberal” speech at the end of the play.⁶

Of course, the values of liberty espoused by Emilia and Desdemona are twisted and maligned by the men in the play. In fact, it is Desdemona’s

very freedom that allows Iago to impugn her virtue. “She is of so free, so kind, so apt, so blest a disposition,” he tells Cassio suggestively, later sneering in soliloquy “She’s framed as fruitful / As the free elements” (2.3.290–91, 308–9). In Iago’s hands, liberty becomes license, and freedom whoredom: “I know our country disposition well,” declares Iago, “In Venice they do let God see the pranks / They dare not show their husbands” (3.3.203–5). Othello finally accepts this (mis)construction, recommending Desdemona’s “sequester from liberty” (3.4.36). Yet, though Iago schemes to imprison his victims in a “net / That shall enmesh them all” (2.3.328–29), he initially does so – ironically – by insisting on his *own* freedom. Feigning resistance to Othello’s insistence that he share his thoughts, Iago exclaims, “Though I am bound to every act of duty, / I am not bound to that all slaves are free to” (3.3.135–36), as he taunts Othello with his inaccessible interiority, an imaginative freedom that even slaves possess.⁷ In this demonic parody of Desdemona’s freedom, Iago provokes Othello’s tyranny by paradoxically insisting on his own freedom from control. “By heaven, I’ll know thy thoughts!” cries Othello imperiously (3.3.163). By the end of the scene, Othello’s “fond love” gives way to “tyrannous hate” (3.3.446, 450), and Iago himself performs exaggerated subjection, swearing that “to obey shall be in [him] remorse / What bloody business ever” (3.3.469–70). As tyrant, Othello becomes subject both to his own passions and to the man who should be subject to him. While, as Rebecca Bushnell has shown, masculine tyranny is implicitly feminized, the subject who suffers abuse is equally identified with the woman as resistant and conscientious subject, as the following chapter will suggest.⁸ Desdemona, using her free speech to articulate her desire to reconcile her husband to Cassio (4.1.214), is openly assaulted by Othello to the horror of onlookers (4.1.231, 255–65). Emilia’s intervention in the final scene has political implications in a play in which the liberty that is gendered female is extirpated by a cruel tyranny associated with the (effeminate) Turks.⁹

The association of the female voice with freedom of speech recurs in *The Winter’s Tale* with a difference. In this play, tyranny is explicitly political as well as domestic since Leontes is King of Sicilia; his jealous madness destroys the immediate heir to the crown. Yet while male courtiers raise objections to his “prerogative” (2.1.164), they end by either (like Camillo) fleeing his power or (like Antigonus) reluctantly carrying out his commands. An entirely invented character with no equivalent in the source material, Paulina alone has the temerity to brave the king’s wrath. “He must be told on’t, and he shall,” she resolves. “The office / Becomes a woman best” (2.2.32–33). Why is a woman especially well-suited to

correct tyranny? Julie Crawford suggests that because (according to the well-known political allegory) “sovereignty should be married to counsel . . . [and] the female counselor, by virtue of her own doubled position, becomes that office best.”¹⁰ Paulina, however, is considerably less conventional than the “loyal servant,” “physician,” and “obedient counselor” she claims as her models (2.3.54–55). Embodying the figure of the shrew, the “callet / Of boundless tongue, who late hath beat her husband” (2.3.90–91), she declares, “I’ll use that tongue I have. If wit flow from’t / As boldness from my bosom” (2.2.53–54). Flaunting that “glibbery member” so mocked and feared in early seventeenth-century culture,¹¹ Paulina reanimates the stereotype invoked by Iago in his wry remark to Cassio about Emilia: “would she give you so much of her lips / As of her tongue she oft bestows on me / You would have enough” (2.1.100–2). Unlike Emilia who remains largely silent and (fatally) subordinate until the final scene, Paulina claims the role of Hermione’s “advocate to th’ loud’st” (2.2.40) from the beginning. “If I prove honey-mouthed, let my tongue blister / And never to my red-looking anger be / The trumpet any more,” she vows (2.2.34–36). Echoing Desdemona’s metaphor of the military “trumpet” for her boldness of speech and action (*Othello* 1.3.246), Paulina claims, like Kent in *King Lear*, that “anger hath a privilege” (2.2.63). Unlike Kent’s, her anger anticipates that of Swetnam’s shrew whose “cruell toongue shee will ring thee such a peale.”¹² “He shall not rule me,” cries Paulina (2.3.50), defying both domestic and political authority. Considering Shakespeare’s early alertness to social attitudes to the shrew as “stark mad or wonderful froward” (*Taming of the Shrew* 1.1.69), one might well ask why he resurrects – and clearly reclaims – this cultural stereotype in the later play.

In one sense, Paulina’s connection to the shrew brings her character perilously close to comic caricature – to the “Dame Partlet” and “Lady Margery” (2.3.75, 159) of medieval folklore – and thus works to defuse the scene’s tragic import, moving it towards the “laughter” appropriate to the play’s genre (2.1.199). In response to Leontes’s criticism of his failure to control his wife, for example, Antigonus recycles stock notions of husbands dominated by their shrewish wives (2.3.109–111). That an unruly woman is licensed to interrogate masculine oppression may indicate the chaotic state of a kingdom that is in thrall to its ruler’s passions. But in another sense, just as Leontes’s reformation is less a return from madness to reason than a submission to a new “madness” of “faith” (5.3.73, 95), Paulina’s bold challenge to Leontes’s “tyranny” (2.3.119) is neither comic nor carnivalesque. Her intervention represents not disorder but a higher

principle of order inherent in Nature and Time that trumps royal authority. Unlike Philip Sidney, who in *The Defense of Poesy* exalts the poet's freedom from subjection to Nature, Paulina aligns herself with *Nature's* freedom in opposition to the laws of men. Hermione's daughter, Paulina observes, is captive not to the king's will but to the womb, whence she is "By law and process of great nature thence / Freed and enfranchised" (2.2.61–62). Like Nature, Time has the power "To o'erthrow law" (4.1.8), and (as the subtitle of Shakespeare source *Pandosto* suggests) to act as the agent whereby Truth "is most manifestly revealed."¹³ When a male courtier chides Paulina for the boldness of her speech, the reformed Leontes defends her, saying "Thou didst speak but well / When most the truth" (3.2.229–30). "Thou speak'st truth," "My true Paulina," repeats Leontes in the play's final act (5.1.55, 81). Absorbing and exceeding the figure of the shrew,¹⁴ Paulina embodies the feminized force of "good goddess Nature" (2.3.103) and speaks on behalf of "*Temporis filia veritas*" ("Truth the daughter of time"), as the motto on *Pandosto's* title page has it. This commitment to speaking truth aligns Paulina with Emilia, who declares "I must needs report the truth" (*Othello* 5.2.129). Yet unlike Emilia's free speech that comes too late to alter events, Paulina's voluble truth-telling remakes the world of the play, moderating and reforming the politics of tyranny.

Shakespeare is not the only Jacobean dramatist who represents women who speak truth to power despite male attempts to silence them. John Webster, too, furnishes his female characters with voices to indict tyranny. In *The White Devil* (1612), for example, Vittoria defies the Cardinal who tries her without evidence for the crimes of adultery and murder and sentences her to prison. Accusing him of "rape," she exclaims: "Yes, you have ravished Justice / Forced her to do your pleasure" (3.2.273–75).¹⁵ While he accuses her of being "mad" and turning "fury," she identifies herself with the female iconography of Astraea, goddess of Justice (3.2.275, 278). Her speech becomes her ultimate form of defiance, as she herself notes. "For since you cannot take my life for deeds, / Take it for words," she cries; "O woman's poor revenge / Which dwells but in the tongue" (3.2.282–84). While like Emilia (who gives Iago the handkerchief), Vittoria is indirectly implicated in the crimes committed by her lover, she is nonetheless given the power to denounce him (4.2.103–23). Associated, like Desdemona and Emilia, with republican and antipapist Venice, Vittoria foregrounds the power of her speech to challenge an autocratic regime.¹⁶ Similarly, in Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* (1613), the imprisoned Duchess indicts her brother as a "tyrant," and both echoes

and extends Vittoria's verbal assaults. "Let them, like tyrants, / Never be remembered but for the ill they have done," she cries in a series of curses on her brothers (4.1.101–2).¹⁷ Though the Duchess does not have the same opportunities to confront her persecutors directly, she reveals an acute awareness of the threat posed by her freedom of speech. If, for Ferdinand, she is a "screech owl" who should cut out her own tongue for fear it betray her husband (3.2.88, 107–8), the Duchess sardonically associates her verbal assertiveness with misogynist ideas of female loquacity. "I would fain put off my last woman's fault," she tells her executioners, "I'd not be tedious to you" (4.2.218–19). Her final words to her brothers suggest that her elimination will allow them to "feed in quiet" after her death (4.2.229), and her death itself is framed as a release from captivity. "The robin red-breast and the nightingale / Never live long in cages," she tells Cariola (4.2.13–14); in his dialogue with the Duchess, Bosola frames the release of the soul from the body as the flight of the lark from a cage (4.2.125–27). After exercising freedom of choice in life, she finds freedom from the cage of life in death.

These plays by Shakespeare and Webster are jewels in the crown of the early modern dramatic canon. Written by male playwrights, played by boy actresses, their female characters champion freedom of speech and defy incarceration. Yet they exist alongside, other, lesser-known female voices of the period worth considering in the same light. When, for example, a pamphlet exposing Elizabeth Caldwell's attempted murder of her husband was printed in 1604, it not only defended her crime as the desperate act of a destitute wife, but also recorded the public "admonitions" she delivered from her prison cell, both in her *Letter to her husband during the time of her imprisonment* and in powerful reported speeches allegedly delivered immediately before her death on 18 June 1603.¹⁸ The *Letter* – written in what, Randall Martin cautiously observes, "appears to be her own voice"¹⁹ – openly denounces the crimes of Caldwell's husband much as Emilia denounces Iago, and delivers a searing call to repentance that anticipates Paulina's remonstrance of Leontes. Indeed, in a final dedicatory epistle, authorship of the pamphlet is claimed by Robert Armin, an actor with the King's Men and himself a published pamphleteer.²⁰ Better known as playing the role of satiric fool in Shakespeare's company, Armin was also clearly a Protestant of the "hotter" variety; in 1590 he contributed a commendatory preface to *A Briefe Resolution of a Right Religion Touching the Controversies, that Are Nowe in England* in which he excoriated the "mockerie and hypocrisie" of papists and praised "zealous protestants" prepared to hear "truth."²¹ In the same year that Armin must have

witnessed Emilia deliver her impassioned onstage outburst in *Othello*, he had a hand in disseminating Caldwell's vigorous address in the service of Protestant religious zeal. Although the "true crime" genre of the pamphlet bears little superficial resemblance to Shakespeare's play, both works invest the female voice with energy and veracity in its challenge to authority.

A would-be murderess and adulterous wife, Caldwell initially expresses penitence for her own sins to authorize her powerful exhortation of her husband and advertise her election. "Repentance is the rare gift of GOD, which is given but to a verie fewe, even to those that seeke it, with many teares, and verie earnestlie with fervent prayers," writes Caldwell to her dissolute husband (C1v). Rapidly turning from her crime to his, she reminds him of his abnegation of responsibility that led to her temptation and fall at the hands of the devil. As in Emilia's case, her subjection to her husband has compromised her integrity. But Caldwell's explicit source text is the Bible, where she finds many warnings against her husband's sin, as in the prophet Daniel's interpretation of God's judgment on King Belshazzar (Dan. 5.27). "*Baltasar*, sayth *Daniell*, expounding the fearefull vision of the hands writing, when hee was banqueting with his Concubines, thou art wayed in the Ballance, and are found light" (C2v), she writes. Identified in the *Geneva Bible* with those who worship false gods "in contempt of the true God" (Dan. 5.4 note d), Belshazzar is a prototype for the idolatrous king who is punished by God with death. It may be no accident that Caldwell's dire warnings are directed at both domestic and political rulers. For, in her final scaffold speech Caldwell offers a direct exhortation to the recently crowned King James to warn him of the dangers of Catholicism. "[M]ost religiously she prayed for the Kings most excellent Majestie . . . that his sacred & royall Person, might be a bright shining lampe of Gods glory in the advancement of the Gospell of Christ, and the overthrowe of poperie and superstition" (D1v), reports the author. Caldwell's call for her husband's "true Reformation" (B4v) thus takes on larger religio-political meaning: her lengthy exposition of the Puritan doctrine of Sabbatarianism, for example, culminates in the "condemnation of those who wilfully oppose themselves against [God's] blessed ordinance, to prophane them; which is one of the crying sinnes of this land, wherewith the whole Kingdome is infected" (C3v). Indeed, this vehement articulation of Puritan doctrine may suggest that Caldwell herself was not really the author of this text, for her execution in June 1603 preceded the January 1604 Hampton Court Conference, in which James alienated the Puritans and enforced their ministers' subscription to the Three Articles on pain of deprivation. When the pamphlet appeared in July 1604, its defense of

“the faithfull ministers and deere servants of Jesus Christ” whom “the world most injuriously did deride, scofe and mock” would certainly have had bitter topical relevance (D2r). Whether or not Caldwell’s voice is authentic, it becomes a vehicle for early Stuart England’s nascent culture of religious and political dissent. “Farewell to the Lawe, too long have I beene in thy subjection,” she cries before proceeding to the gallows (B4r), a moment that recalls Emilia’s repudiation of power structures before her death.²² In Caldwell’s case, it is important to distinguish between “negative liberty,” or freedom *from* interference, and “positive liberty,” freedom *to* pursue alternate goals. The latter, as Isaiah Berlin warns, when identified with “a social ‘whole’ of which the individual is an element or aspect: a tribe, a race, a church, a state,” can be used “to justify the coercion of some men by others in order to raise them to a ‘higher’ level of freedom.”²³ Elizabeth Caldwell exercises her own freedom of speech even as she calls down God’s judgment on those “who turne the Sabbath of the lord, into a day of wantonnes, liberty and licentiousnes” (C3v), associating the freedom of those outside her Puritan community with vice and implicitly justifying their persecution. Female voices raised to defend their own liberty may thus work to restrict that of others.

At first glance, Elizabeth Caldwell appears to have little in common with Shakespeare’s Emilia, beyond the probable coincidence of the appearance of both works in the English marketplace in 1604 – about the same year Elizabeth Cary probably wrote *The Tragedy of Mariam*, another representation of a wife standing up to her husband/ruler’s tyranny (discussed later in this book). They represent different genres written in completely different idioms and their female subjects occupy different points on the spectrum: if Emilia’s voice in *Othello* is an act of male ventriloquism by playwright and boy actress, Caldwell’s authorship of her *Letter* is framed and possibly constructed by men, while Elizabeth Cary is clearly a woman writer.²⁴ Yet these cultural productions were consumed or produced at around the same moment in early modern culture.²⁵ They contain an excoriation of abusive male authority – and of the “villainy” (*Othello* 5.2.189–92) or the “sinful course of life” (*Letter* C1r) – that allows it to flourish. A second cluster of texts, including *The Winter’s Tale*, *The White Devil*, and *The Duchess of Malfi*, all date from the years 1610–13, when Aemilia Lanyer’s *Salve Deus Rex Judæorum* (1611) also appeared (discussed later in this book). Some of these works – plays such as *Othello*, *The Winter’s Tale*, *The Duchess of Malfi*, and *The Tragedy of Mariam* as well as poems by Aemilia Lanyer – openly engage with the political term “tyranny.” But what is striking about all these early modern texts is the

privilege they accord to the female voice in speaking truth to power. Though at risk of sounding like a shrew or a fury, women in each of these works are licensed to exercise freedom of speech to expose unjust magistrates. “Nay, lay thee down and roar,” Emilia tells Othello, “I’ll make thee known” (*Othello* 5.2.197, 164). “Thy tyranny, / Together working with thy jealousies / . . . oh, think what they have done, / And then run mad indeed, stark mad,” Paulina taunts Leontes (*The Winter’s Tale* 3.2.176–80). “[T]he wrath of the Lord & his jealousie, shall smooke against that man, and every curse that is written in this booke shall light upon him,” cries Elizabeth Caldwell in her attack on her husband (C4v). “Must I, like to a slave-born Russian / Account it praise to suffer tyranny?” cries the Duchess after her banishment at the hands of her brothers (*Duchess of Malfi* 3.5.74–75). Invoking the higher authorities of God, Nature, or Truth to challenge masculine abuses of power, these female voices suggest that, in Paulina’s words, “the office / Becomes a woman best” (*The Winter’s Tale* 2.2.32–33).

This figure of the plain-speaking woman whose free speech communicates her clear conscience and her zeal has a history. Though John Bale records the “tyrannouse vyolence” suffered by the mid-sixteenth-century Protestant martyr Anne Askew in his *Examinations*,²⁶ Askew’s own voice stands as a marker of the authenticity of her ordeal and of her powerful indictment of her enemies. “Well, well, sayd I, God wyl laughe your threttenynges to scorne,” she declares before her torturers in a paraphrase of Psalm 2.4.²⁷ The title pages of both the First and the Latter Examination feature a woodcut of Askew trampling on the papal beast, with the motto, “Anne Askewe stode fast by thys veryte of God to the ende.” Her insistence on freely speaking the unmediated truth of Scripture made her a powerful and enduring symbol of the Reformation, and her commitment to the simple vernacular associated her with a lost history of women who formed “a shadowy legacy of dissent against the official church.”²⁸ Later sixteenth-century examples follow Askew’s lead. One of the most frequently reprinted texts in the period, Puritan Philip Stubbes’s posthumous tribute to his wife Katherine, praises her “feruent zeale . . . to the truth,” when she “would not yield a jot” to “papistes or atheists,” but “would most mightily justifie the truth of God against their blasphemous untruths and convince them, yea, and confound them by the testimonies of the word of God.”²⁹ Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke, versified the Psalms to denounce tyranny and represent the commitments of her militantly Protestant family.³⁰ “And call yee this to utter what is just / You that of justice hold the sov’raign throne?” writes the Countess of

Pembroke in her rendition of the psalmist's exhortation of "oppression" in Psalm 58.³¹ Similarly, women writers such as Anne Cooke Bacon, Anne Dowriche and Anne Vaughan Locke were key participants in the Elizabethan Puritan project.³² In the sixteenth century the woman speaking truth to power had the potential to figure political and religious dissent.

By contrast, the seventeenth century – which ushered in male monarchs beginning with King James – is sometimes thought to be "defined through its exclusion of women."³³ Yet defiant female figures were especially prominent during the early Stuart period. Lisa Hopkins contends that the "rise of the strong female hero . . . emerges as a widespread phenomenon in the period from about 1610, when we find a rush of female protagonists on the English stage,"³⁴ while Naomi Liebler suggests that "Not until the Jacobean, with some 18 instances between 1604 and 1625, does the female tragic protagonist command the stage and the page as the titular hero."³⁵ Plays such as *Othello* and *The Winter's Tale* – in which Emilia and Paulina are far from the titular heroes – license women's freedom of speech in excoriating male authority. And, while these plays are secular, they nonetheless build on the legacy of the martyr as "the definitive religious parrhesiast" when women such as Paulina, Emilia, and the Duchess invite and anticipate suffering and death for their uncompromising speech.³⁶ "What studied torments, tyrant, hast for me?" cries Paulina, "What wheels, racks, fires? What flaying, boiling / In leads or oils? What old or newer torture / Must I receive, whose every word deserves / To taste of thy most worst?" (*The Winter's Tale* 3.2.172–76). "It is an heretic that makes the fire," she claims, "Not she which burns in't" (2.3.114–15). Aligning herself with female martyrs like Askew, Paulina taps into religious discourse that sets her at a distance from court flatterers and the court itself. "She openeth her mouthe to wysdome / and in her language is the lawe of grace' (Proverb. xxxi),"³⁷ reads the title page of *The First Examination of Anne Askew*; the *Geneva Bible* explains: "Her tongue is as a boke whereby one might lerne manie good things for she deliteth to talke of the worde of God" (Prov. 31.26 note n). If this early Reformation legitimization of the female voice may seem remote from an Emilia or a Paulina, we may be underestimating the power of confessional discourses in early modern England. For, observes Debora Shuger, "Religion during this period supplies the primary language of analysis" serving as "the cultural matrix for explorations of virtually every topic."³⁸ "O God! O heavenly God!" cries Emilia in the Quarto as she begins to recognize the enormity of Iago's deception (*Othello* 5.2.216); "So come my

soul to bliss, as I speak true,” she says as she dies (5.2.248). Though, like the Folio text of *Othello*, *The Winter's Tale* is constrained by the 1606 Act to Restrain the Abuses of Players that exacted heavy fines for references to God, Paulina invokes as surrogates not only “good goddess Nature” and “the divine Apollo” but also the “faith” necessary for revelation (*The Winter's Tale* 2.3.103, 5.1.37, 5.3.95). Like Elizabeth Caldwell, both Paulina and Emilia are wives whose duties to their husbands are overridden by their higher duty to call out tyranny and abuse – even at the risk of being taken for disobedient wives or scolds. Similarly, Webster’s female protagonists excoriate the tyrannical men who incarcerate and execute them.

Immersed in a deeply Protestant culture, Shakespeare and Webster may have had some connections with its “hotter” varieties. At first glance, any sympathies for Puritan interests seem unlikely. After all, just as Webster represents Puritans in *The Duchess of Malfi* satirically as zealots plagued with “sore throats with over-straining” (4.2.83–84), Shakespeare appears to mock Malvolio as a “kind of puritan” for his repression of natural appetites in *Twelfth Night* (2.3.129). “Dost thou think,” cries Sir Toby Belch to Malvolio, “because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale?” (2.3.106–7). Yet as Paul Yachnin points out, given Maria’s cautious disclaimer (2.3.135) “Malvolio might not be intended to be taken for a Puritan at all.” As he goes on to argue, “Shakespeare is careful to attenuate the connection between Malvolio and real-life Puritans, whether the reforming party in the English Church or the political establishment of London.”³⁹ Many scholars believe that Shakespeare was acquainted with the scion of the Sidney/Essex family, William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, one of the dedicatees of the First Folio and possibly the “onlie begetter” of the sonnets.⁴⁰ Identifying the bold female voice in *Othello* with classical republican liberty, Mark Matheson speculates that this “may reflect [Shakespeare’s] sympathy with the political interests of the Sidney and Essex circles, with which of course he had some connection.”⁴¹ Yet Pembroke himself was also associated not only with classical humanism but also – albeit pejoratively – with the Puritan cause: a libel dated to 1618–20 represents Lucy Russell, Countess of Bedford presiding over a “puritan shrine” at which her second cousin the “weake Lord Chamberlaine” worships.⁴² Similarly, despite his satiric portrait of a madman in *The Duchess of Malfi* who finds salvation only in “the Helvetian translation” (the *Geneva Bible*) (4.2.91), Webster identifies the virtuous Antonio as “precise” (2.3.65) – “a code term for Puritans during the period,” as Leah Marcus points out.⁴³ And Luke Wilson observes that

Webster “lived in a milieu closely associated with both puritan and common law interests.”⁴⁴ Those interests – often combined in Members of Parliament with Puritan sympathies – raised questions of political and religious liberty compatible with the idea of monarchical sovereignty.⁴⁵ Though a far cry from Puritan sermons, the dramatic works produced by these playwrights echo the reformed Protestant construction of a female voice that, I argue, exceeds the domestic to occupy significant *political* space in its demand for “reasonable libertie.”

Indeed, instances of legitimate female anger directed at abuses of authority abound in Jacobean plays. Before veering into comedy, for example, *Measure for Measure* – likely one of Shakespeare’s first Jacobean plays – allows Isabella to express her rage at Angelo’s corruption of power in the form of generalized political commentary:

Oh, perilous mouths,
That bear in them one and the selfsame tongue
Either of condemnation or approval,
Bidding the law make curtsy to their will,
Hooking both right and wrong to th’apetite
To follow as it draws! [2.4.169–74]

This image of male hypocrisy as a double tongue serving the appetite is implicitly contrasted with Isabella’s own “outstretched throat” threatening to “tell the world aloud” of Angelo’s vice (2.4.150). And, though the duke initially discredits Isabella in the play’s final scene, her speech demanding “justice, justice, justice, justice” (5.1.27) is necessary to expose and punish Angelo. While she ultimately serves as an instrument in the duke’s larger scheme, Isabella joins the ranks of truth-speaking female characters in Jacobean drama who expose powerful men. If, as Andrew Hadfield argues, “*Measure for Measure* parodies republicanism as a means of signalling its irrelevance,” this may indicate that republicanism – a “masculine phenomenon” at the heart of Elizabethan political critique – was being superseded by a feminized form of critique rooted in the religious discourse of counsel and conscience.⁴⁶

This book will argue that such representations of the female voice could take on a particularly acute political inflection during the early Stuart period. Of course, many scholars have argued that Jacobean literature offers oblique political commentary on the reign of the king whose “servants” comprised Shakespeare’s own company of players. In *James I and the Politics of Literature*, for example, Jonathan Goldberg recognizes that the duke in *Measure for Measure* is “the clearest emblem for the relationship of literature and politics in the Jacobean period.”⁴⁷

Similarly, while rejecting any simple political allegory, Stephen Orgel finds in *The Winter's Tale* a thorough engagement with James's construction of mystical kingship and its effects on the polity, noting that "Shakespeare in the first decade of the new reign rethinks the nature of kingship . . . both in terms of how much beyond the merely political is invested in the office, and of what sorts of sanctions there might be to contain a king who abuses his prerogatives."⁴⁸ For John Russell Brown, the Italian setting of *The White Devil* is "a pretense that allowed Webster to evade the strict censorship that had landed Ben Jonson and other dramatists in prison for showing too clearly their criticism of King James I."⁴⁹ In *Censorship and Interpretation*, Annabel Patterson finds in Shakespeare's *King Lear* an authoritarian patriarch facing the frank counsel of Kent much as James faced the Commons' defense of their parliamentary privilege.⁵⁰ Building on this scholarship, James Shapiro's *The Year of Lear* reads Shakespeare's major Jacobean tragedies as complex responses to the climactic political events of 1606.⁵¹

Building on such historicized interpretations largely centered on the king himself, scholars have also noted the strong female voices in these dramas, accounting for them by pointing to the increasing influence of women playgoers, the prominence of female counsellors and courtiers, the "heroics of marriage" advocated by Puritans, or nostalgia for the nationalist and Protestant values of Queen Elizabeth.⁵² Others have associated them with cultural images of the unruly woman widely disseminated in ballads and broadsheets – images that could nonetheless work to "sanction riot and political disobedience" and "become part and parcel of conflict resulting from efforts to change the basic distribution of power in society."⁵³ Such explanatory frameworks contextualize the place of women in Jacobean culture in valuable and illuminating ways. Yet representations of the free-speaking women who demand "reasonable libertie" in early Stuart works merit further examination. This book will argue that the political force of the female voice is grounded in the pervasive and well-known Jacobean analogies between household and State, woman and Church – an analogy that women writers themselves exploited, revised, and expanded in their own writing.

Notes

- 1 All citations to the text of *Othello* refer to *Othello*, ed. Norman Sanders, 3rd ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2018).
- 2 See Jared R. Curtis, "'As Liberrall as the North': Emilia's Unruliness – A Study in Context," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 17.2 (1966): 168–71.

- 3 All citations to other plays by Shakespeare refer to *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt et al., 3rd ed. (New York: Norton, 2016).
- 4 Michael Neill, "Introduction," *Othello* (Oxford University Press, 2006), 175.
- 5 Mark Matheson, "Venetian Culture and the Politics of *Othello*," in Catherine M.S. Alexander (ed.), *Shakespeare and Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 181.
- 6 Andrew Hadfield observes that, "Cassio is a Florentine, Iago and Roderigo are Spanish, not Venetian names which certainly complicates an English audience's sense of place, and Othello is not Venetian either, of course" ("Shakespeare and Republican Venice," in Laura Tosi and Shaul Bassi (eds.), *Visions of Venice in Shakespeare* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2011), 78).
- 7 Peter Holbrook notes that "villains want freedom too," and reads Philip Sidney's image of the poet "freely ranging only within the zodiac of his own wit," as "almost diabolical" (*English Renaissance Tragedy: Ideas of Freedom* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 26–27). Stephen Greenblatt notes that "the phrase 'liberty to live after one's own law' could best serve as the motto for some of the most disturbing villains who haunted Shakespeare's imagination" (*Shakespeare's Freedom* (University of Chicago Press, 2010), 122).
- 8 Rebecca Bushnell, *Tragedies of Tyrants: Political Thought and Theater in the English Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).
- 9 See Daniel J. Vitkus, *Turning Turk: English Theater and the Multicultural Mediterranean 1570–1630* (London: Palgrave, 2003).
- 10 "Keeping Counsel: Female Constancy in Shakespeare's England," unpublished plenary address to the 2013 Shakespeare Association of America conference. I am grateful to Julie Crawford for furnishing me with a copy of her talk. See also John Guy, who notes that "*imperium* was represented as male and *consilium* as female" ("The Henrician Age," in J.G.A. Pocock (ed.), *The Varieties of British Political Thought, 1500–1800* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 16).
- 11 Richard Brathwaite, *The English Gentlewoman* (London, 1630), 88. The harlot is a verbose figure in Prov. 7.21: "With her great craft she caused him to yelde, with her flattering lippes she entised him."
- 12 Joseph Swetnam, *Araignment of Lewd, Idle, Froward and Unconstant Women* (London, 1615), 8. Though Swetnam's text postdates the play, his misogyny recycles cultural commonplaces.
- 13 Title page, Robert Greene, *Pandosto the Triumph of Time* (London, 1588).
- 14 Carolyn Asp also observes that "although she exhibits many naturalistic features such as the bold tongue of the shrew, she transcends the constrictions of this merely comic role." Asp finds antecedents for the character of Paulina in medieval allegorical figures such as Boethius's Lady Philosophy and Dante's Beatrice ("Shakespeare's Paulina and the Consolatio Tradition," *Shakespeare Studies* 11 (1978): 147).
- 15 All citations to *The White Devil* refer to John Webster, *The White Devil*, ed. Christina Luckyj (London: Methuen, 2008).
- 16 For a longer version of this argument see my essay, "Boy Prince and Venetian Courtesan: Political Critique in *The White Devil*," in Adam Hansen and Paul

- Frazer (eds.), *The Arden Early Modern Drama Guide to The White Devil* (London: Arden/Bloomsbury, 2016), 156–71.
- 17 All citations to *The Duchess of Malfi* refer to John Webster, *The Duchess of Malfi*, ed. Leah S. Marcus (London: Arden Bloomsbury, 2009).
 - 18 Gilbert Dugdale, *A True Discourse of the Practises of Elizabeth Caldwell* (London, 1604), B2r. All subsequent references to this text appear in parentheses.
 - 19 Randall Martin (ed.), *Women Writers in Renaissance England* (Harlow: Pearson, 2010), 139. Lynn Robson observes: “We cannot know for certain whether Elizabeth actually wrote this letter or if it is a product of the pamphlet writer’s imagination but the insistence that it is ‘of her own indighting’ inclines towards its authenticity.” Her final position constructs Caldwell as both historical person and fictional character capable in either case of “authoritative writing and speaking” from her prison cell (“‘Now Farewell to the Lawe, Too Long Have I Been in thy Subjection’: Early Modern Murder, Calvinism and Female Spiritual Authority,” *Literature and Theology* 22.3 (2008): 302, 308.)
 - 20 Based on Armin’s claim that he “placed [his] kinsman’s name to it,” Robson compellingly argues that “authorship actually belongs to Armin, ‘ghosting’ for (or collaborating with) Gilbert Dugdale [the ostensible author]” (303). If so, Armin was possibly involved in a double ghostwriting (of Caldwell’s Letter and Dugdale’s pamphlet) since Dugdale is credited with authorship of the pamphlet on the title page.
 - 21 “R. Armin in Praise and Commendation,” in C.S., *A Briefe Resolution of a Right Religion Touching the Controversies, that Are Nowe in England* (London, 1590), A1v.
 - 22 Robson finds Caldwell’s reference to the “Lawe” ambiguous, as it could signify the political system that incarcerated her, the law of submission to her husband, the law of Scripture that proscribes her public speech, or the Old Testament law of death from which she is released by God’s Grace (297). While all these meanings may come into play, her speech may also echo the narrator’s statement that she and her accomplices were committed to the castle at Chester “till they should be delivered by due course of Lawe” (B2r). If so, Caldwell’s own words claim delivery not *by* the law but *from* it, and thus repudiates secular magistrates.
 - 23 Isaiah Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1958), 17.
 - 24 When *The Tragedie of Mariam* was printed in 1613, its title page advertised the author as “that learned, virtuous and truly noble Ladie, E.C.”
 - 25 Shakespeare may have written *Othello* as early as 1601, the year that one of his sources (Philemon Holland’s translation of Pliny’s *Historie of the World*) appeared, but most scholars put the date of composition closer to 1603–4 after James became king, since the play appears to capitalize openly on some of his interests. The theatres were closed because of plague for more than a year, from March 1603 to April 1604, and Shakespeare may have taken the opportunity to write *Othello* and *Measure for Measure*, basing both on tales

- from Giovanni Battista Giraldi Cinthio's 1565 collection, *Gli Hecatommithi*. Whenever the play was written, we know that on November 1, 1604, Shakespeare's company, "the King's Majesty's players," performed "a play in the Banqueting House at Whitehall called the Moor of Venice [by] Shaxberd [Shakespeare]," though we don't know if this was the play's first performance or a reprise of its previous debut on the public stage of the Globe. See Michael Neill's discussion of the date of the play in his Oxford edition (399–404).
- 26 Askew's text stands in a similar relation to Bale's framing narrative as Caldwell's text does to Dugdale/Armin's. In both cases male authors claim to include an authentic female-authored text. The uncertain authorship of Askew's text is often overlooked by scholars, as Thomas S. Freeman and Sarah Elizabeth Wall observe: "It is important to emphasize an issue that is often elided in consideration of Askew's *Examinations* – that, precisely speaking, it does not exist . . . An autograph manuscript of Askew's text has never been found." ("Racking the Body, Shaping the Text: The Account of Anne Askew in Foxe's 'Book of Martyrs,'" *Renaissance Quarterly* 54 (2001): 6).
- 27 *The Examinations of Anne Askew*, ed. Elaine V. Beilin (Oxford University Press, 1996), 88, 98.
- 28 Jennifer Summit, *Lost Property: The Woman Writer and English Literary History 1380–1589* (University of Chicago Press, 2000), 149. See also Kimberly Anne Coles, *Religion, Reform and Writing in Early Modern England* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), Chapter 1.
- 29 Phillip Stubbes, *A Crystall Glasse, for Christian Women* (London, 1591), A2v. Marcy L. North notes that the pamphlet was "one of the most reprinted publications of the early seventeenth century," though as a mediated text it is usually excluded from the canon of early modern women's literature. "Katherine was praised in the pamphlet not for her silence but for reading and speaking out in the name of her reformed religion," observes North ("Women, the Material Book and Early Printing," in Laura Lunger Knoppers (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Early Modern Women's Writing* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 73).
- 30 See Margaret P. Hannay, *Philip's Phoenix: Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke* (Oxford University Press, 1990), Chapter 4.
- 31 *The Psalms of Sir Philip Sidney and the Countess of Pembroke*, ed. J.C.A. Rathmell (New York University Press, 1963), 133. Though circulated in manuscript, the Psalms were not printed until the nineteenth century.
- 32 On Dowriche see Elaine Beilin, "Some Freely Spake Their Minde': Resistance in Anne Dowriche's French Historie," in Mary E. Burke, Jane Donawerth, Linda L. Dove and Karen Nelson (eds.), *Women, Writing and the Reproduction of Culture in Tudor and Stuart Britain* (Syracuse University Press, 2000); on Vaughan Locke see *The Collected Works of Anne Vaughan Lock*, ed. Susan M. Felch (Tempe: Renaissance English Text Society, 1999); and on Bacon see Jaime Goodrich, "Reconsidering the Woman Writer: The Identity Politics of Anne Cooke Bacon," in Patricia Phillippy (ed.), *A History of Early Modern Women's Writing* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 46–65.

- 33 Summit, 204.
- 34 Lisa Hopkins, *The Female Hero in English Renaissance Tragedy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 2.
- 35 Naomi Liebler (ed.), *The Female Tragic Hero in English Renaissance Drama* (Houndmills: Palgrave 2002), 22. Liebler also questions the assumption that “female characters written by Shakespeare and his contemporaries are only a male fantasy of the female . . . and moreover, that this imagining must be fundamentally and substantively different from the ways in which they would have been imagined by Shakespeare’s sister” (3).
- 36 David Colclough, *Freedom of Speech in Early Stuart England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 91. “Parrhesia” is the figure for the “libertie to speake” in classical rhetoric (OED Angel Day, *English Secretarie*).
- 37 In the King James Bible, “kindness” is substituted for “grace,” in what appears to be an attempt to reduce the woman as a vehicle for divine Grace.
- 38 Debora Kuller Shuger, *Habits of Thought in the English Renaissance: Religion, Politics and the Dominant Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 6.
- 39 Paul Yachnin, “Reversal of Fortune: Shakespeare, Middleton and the Puritans,” *ELH* 70 (2003): 781.
- 40 Though it will probably never be resolved, the case for W.H. as William Herbert is made compellingly by Mary Ellen Lamb, “‘Love Is Not Love’: Shakespeare’s Sonnet 16, Pembroke and the Inns of Court,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 70 (2019): 126.
- 41 Matheson, 170. Noting that “the domestic sphere [in *Othello*] is charged over the course of the play with the displaced energies of state politics,” Matheson claims that Shakespeare’s association of women with political freedom signals his interest in the republican values of Venice (180). The association between women and republican values is most visible in figures like Shakespeare’s Lucrece as “the ideal subject” who, as Andrew Hadfield observes, “stands as the body politic, abused as a possession by the monarch, who fails to see that the people who make up the state have voices and rights as well as corporeal existence, as her increasingly articulate speech proves.” Yet as he notes, “Lucrece is represented as a male fantasy, a self-sacrificing figure, prepared to die for a political ideal . . . republicanism rarely managed to escape from the discourses of misogyny that enveloped it.” (Andrew Hadfield, *Shakespeare and Republicanism* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 152–53).
- 42 Cited in Marion O’Connor, “Godly Patronage: Lucy Harington Russell, Countess of Bedford,” in Elizabeth Scott-Baumann and Johanna Harris (eds.), *The Intellectual Culture of Puritan Women 1558–1680* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 71.
- 43 Leah S. Marcus, “The Duchess’s Marriage in Contemporary Contexts,” in Christina Luckyj (ed.), *The Duchess of Malfi: A Critical Guide* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), 112.
- 44 Luke Wilson, “*The White Devil* and the Law,” in Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr., Patrick Cheney, and Andrew Hadfield (eds.), *Early Modern English Drama: A Critical Companion* (Oxford University Press, 2006), 231.

- 45 On the “Puritan sympathies of many who sat in the Commons,” see Tim Harris, *Rebellion: Britain's First Stuart Kings, 1567–1642* (Oxford University Press, 2014), 77. For a thoughtful discussion of Quentin Skinner’s idea of “neo-Roman” liberty circulating among members of Parliament in early Stuart England, see Johann Sommerville, “English and Roman Liberty in the Monarchical Republic of Early Stuart England,” in John F. McDiarmid (ed.), *The Monarchical Republic of Early Modern England: Essays in Response to Patrick Collinson* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2007).
- 46 Hadfield, *Shakespeare and Republicanism*, 208. He observes that “Republicanism was invariably cast as a masculine phenomenon, and was established over the dead body of a woman” (174). However, Hadfield’s contention that “many of his subjects appear to have recognized the stability that James brought, Shakespeare among them” is clearly debatable (206).
- 47 See Jonathan Goldberg, *James I and the Politics of Literature: Jonson, Shakespeare, Donne and their Contemporaries* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), 239. Most editions of the play discuss contemporary political allusions to James and events of his reign (see, for example, Brian Gibbons, “Introduction,” *Measure for Measure* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 20–21.)
- 48 Stephen Orgel (ed.), *The Winter's Tale* (Oxford University Press, 1996), 14–15.
- 49 John Russell Brown (ed.), *The White Devil* (Manchester University Press, 1996). 4.
- 50 Annabel Patterson, *Censorship and Interpretation: The Conditions of Writing and Reading in Early Modern England* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 65–72.
- 51 James Shapiro, *The Year of Lear: Shakespeare in 1606* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2015).
- 52 See Linda Woodbridge, *Women and the English Renaissance: Literature and the Nature of Womankind 1540–1620* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983), Chapter 10; Julie Crawford, *Mediatix: Women, Politics, and Literary Production in Early Modern England* (Oxford University Press, 2014); Mary Beth Rose, *The Expense of Spirit: Love and Sexuality in English Renaissance Drama* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988); John Webster, *The Duchess of Malfi*, ed. Leah Marcus (London: Bloomsbury Arden, 2009), 11–13.
- 53 Natalie Zemon Davis, “Women on Top: Symbolic Sexual Inversion and Political Disorder in Early Modern Europe,” in Barbara A. Babcock (ed.), *The Reversible World: Symbolic Inversion in Art and Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 154–55; Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (University of Chicago Press, 1984), 240.