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Introduction

As we are finalizing this special issue of *Linguae &* on "Shakespeare and Women: Voices and Silences", Italy is experiencing an unprecedented response to yet another case of feminicide. Twenty-two-year-old Giulia Cecchettin was stabbed to death by her ex-boyfriend (and university mate) just a few days before the ceremony of her graduation in biomedical engineering.[1] The killer spoke these disturbing words to the prosecutor: "I loved her, I wanted her for myself. I did not accept that it was over"[2]. He could not bear the thought that she had left him nor, presumably, the fact that she would graduate before him. Driven by an urge to control and possess her, he turned her, discursively and materially, from subject into object. The word persona originates from the Latin

[1] A degree in memoriam for Giulia Cecchettin is to be awarded by the University of Padua on 2 February 2024.

[2] https://www.ansa.it/english/news/2023/12/02/i-wanted-her-for-myself-terrible-murder-says-turetta_b37dbbb9-fa9f-451a-b774-11222a15e4ce.html (2/12/2023).

personare, meaning 'to sound thorough'. The killer did not accept her 'sound', so he stopped it by killing her.

Sara Cecchettin pushed back against the Italian government's invitation to hold a minute's silence for her sister. Instead, she called for a minute's noise, symbolically restoring her sister's voice and loudly rebelling against gender-based violence. On 21 November 2023, at eleven o'clock, schools and universities across Italy resounded with noise. At the woman's funeral, mourners boisterously honoured her life, clapping their hands and shaking their keys. Although not presentist-feminist in its approach, this special issue aptly keeps – to misquote Terence Hawkes (1992, 3) – 'making noise *by* Shakespeare'. Sharing Ania Loomba and Melissa Sanchez's idea that "studies of early modern literature, history, and culture can contribute to a rethinking of feminist aims" (2016, 1), it seeks to cast further light on the definitions and interrelations of female voices and silences, subjectivity and objectivity, speech and non-speech, adding to the ongoing feminist debate on these topics.

"Shakespeare and Women: Voices and Silences" is critically located within feminist Shakespeare scholarship. 'Officially' inaugurated almost 50 years ago by Juliet Dusinberre's *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women* (1975), it continues to be a productive and influential approach, representing a widespread gender-conscious way of selecting, rewriting, editing, reading, performing, teaching and investigating Shakespeare's work. The present issue is theoretically grounded in Phyllis Rackin's challenge to "the pervasive scholarly investment in Renaissance misogyny" (2016, 62) and in Christina Luckyj's attempt "to make it more difficult to refer unthinkingly to early modern women as 'chaste, silent and obedient'" (2002, 7). Lucky reveals silence as "a crucial site where gender markers could be reinforced, interrogated or elided on the early modern stage" (ibid. 91). Here, however, the enquiry extends across Shakespeare's early modern texts up to their 'afterlife'. Methodologically, it avoids the sharp "contrast between emphasizing women's agency and emphasizing women's containment" (Novy 2017, 6), concentrating instead on the complex dynamics between the two opposing conditions.

Moving from common meanings of voice as speech and silence as non-speech, thus blurring the oxymoronic relationship between the two terms, the papers collected in this issue focus not only on Shakespeare's "vocal women",

as Anna Kamaralli terms "women who continue to speak their truth about the world, no matter what means others employ to silence them" (2012, 1), but also on women's silent voices and voiced silences, on women ventriloquized by Shakespeare and 'Shakespeares' ventriloquized by women.

The first four contributions examine female speech, offering different angles and methodological approaches. The issue opens with Beatrice Righetti's essay, which investigates the potential subversive role of female speech. As the author demonstrates, female silence and reticence can be seen as powerful forms of resistance to patriarchal authority. Her case studies provide examples of opposite attitudes to language on the part of female characters. The loquacious Kate and the silent Bianca in *The Taming of the Shrew* and the talkative Portia and the reticent Jessica in *The Merchant of Venice* show that silent disobedience may be much more effective than open opposition. In her essay, Aoife Beville comes to a similar conclusion. Moving from a pragma-stylistic perspective, the author examines acts of verbal deception in *Measure for Measure* and *All's Well That Ends Well*, pointing out how male and female characters use mendacious strategies differently. Her quantitative and qualitative analysis reveals that, unlike men, women significantly prefer off-the-record verbal deception over outright lying. Virginia Tesei tackles another aspect of women's use of language, concentrating on silence. Her essay clarifies the influence of the myth of Philomel, famously recounted in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Focusing on the parallels between Hermia, Titania and Bottom and the Ovidian character, Tesei demonstrates that Philomela's story reverberates in the play and that her silence is a metaphor for the silence imposed by censorship in the Elizabethan period. Finally, Simona Laghi considers the voice 'sounded' by the 'language' of female appearance. She explores the connections between fashion, appearance and social acceptance. Her investigation revolves around three iconic characters from the Shakespearean canon, namely Rosaline in *Love's Labour's Lost*, Katherina in *The Taming of the Shrew* and Cleopatra in *Antony and Cleopatra*, three women who managed to negotiate their role in society by distancing themselves from the early modern stereotypes about outward appearance and obedience. Laghi reflects on the construction of womanhood in the early modern period and on

the achievements of gender equality and women's rights in the twenty-first century.

The following (and last) three contributions deal with reception, both in and of Shakespeare. Maria Elisa Montironi's essay aims at considering Christine de Pizan's voice in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. De Pizan was an influential woman, whose support of the recognition of women's role and equality distinctly resonated in the early modern period. Montironi scrutinizes Shakespeare's play, in particular the characters Theseus and Hippolyta and Pyramus and Thisbe, in light of de Pizan's works, to suggest possible new insights into the comedy and its play-within-the-play. With Gilberta Golinelli's contribution, the issue enters the 'afterlife' of Shakespeare works. The paper discusses the prominent role of Margaret Cavendish, a pioneer as a feminist and a female thinker, in the rise of Shakespearean criticism. Cavendish's insightful reading of Shakespeare's works identified crucial issues, such as the social construction of gender, sexuality and the representation of class, which have been central to feminist theory since the 1980s. The last essay looks at Shakespeare's voice appropriated by a contemporary female designer, Marla Aaron. Cristina Paravano discusses Aaron's appropriation of Shakespeare's words to convey her vision and ethos, illuminating how Shakespeare can be used by a female artist to proclaim her message of inclusion, empowerment and self-inclusion. The collection is closed by the authoritative and passionate voice of Evelyn Gajowski, who has generously accepted our invitation to contribute to this special issue. Her afterword retraces the achievements of Shakespeare feminist studies and the new challenges that we are now facing. As she rightly observes, female voices and silences in Shakespeare's texts are inextricably bound with both female subjectivity and female objectification, which "are deserving of greater theoretical and critical attention in the twenty-first century" (see Gajowski in this issue). We hope that this issue will do its part. Further, we hope to expand this study on female voices and silences, in the near future, to early modern drama beyond Shakespeare.[3]

[3] We are grateful to *Linguae &* and its General Editor, Prof. Alessandra Calanchi, for believing in this project and hosting this special issue, helping us enormously in the editing process. No less grateful are we to the anonymous reviewers, for their very attentive reading of and extremely useful feedback on the proposed papers. Our warm and heartfelt gratitude goes to all

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