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Speech, Silence, and Shakespearean Quotation in *The Sounding* (2017)

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Abstract: This article examines Catherine Eaton’s *The Sounding* (2017). It uses the polarised critical interpretations that have emerged in response to Isabella’s wordlessness in Act 5 of Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure* as a useful set of lenses for considering the non–normative communication strategies employed by Liv, the female protagonist in this cinematic adaptation of *The Tempest*. Orphaned as a child, the thirty-something Liv has been brought up in relative isolation on an island off the coast of Maine by her doting (and overtly Prospero-like) grandfather Lionel, a retired psychiatric professional. Though well-read, quick-witted, and the cultural beneficiary of her grandfather’s careful tutelage, from childhood, Liv has not spoken. When she finally breaks her long years of verbal silence on foot of Lionel’s death partway through the film, Liv’s output proves to be exclusively limited to Shakespearean quotations – much to the consternation of her emergent love interest Dr. Michael Lande. Focusing on the gender politics of silence, quotation, audibility, and canonicity in Eaton’s film, the article queries, in turn, whether Liv’s storyline in *The Sounding* is best understood as a tale of linguistic resistance and empowerment or as one of inarticulacy and patriarchal domination.

Keywords: *The Tempest*; film adaptation; gender; canonicity; audibility

In William Shakespeare’s dramatic corpus, as in life, it is sometimes “The empty vessel [that] makes the greatest sound” (*Henry V* 4.4.65–66), while things left unsaid can often be just as important as those that are articulated. We might consider, for instance, the enigmatic wordlessness of Isabella in Act 5 of *Measure for Measure*, a work that is itself concerned on multiple levels with silence and lacunae. In the play’s much-discussed final scene, Isabella verbally fails to respond to the Duke of Vienna’s marriage proposals. This would-be nun utters nothing at all when abruptly instructed by her male social superior to proffer her “hand, and say [she] will be [his]” (5.1.491), and she remains noticeably speechless upon hearing the Duke’s subsequent declaration,

Dear Isabel,
I have a motion much imports your good,
Whereto, if you’ll a willing ear incline,
What’s mine is yours, and what is yours is mine.
(5.1.533–36)

Her silence in this scene, as Elizabeth Hanson has put it, “marks Isabella as a rent in the play’s coherence, a site of unspeakable confusion in its discourse” (74). Much the same could be said about the largely wordless – and then exclusively Shakespeare-quoting – Liv in *The Sounding* (2017), Catherine Eaton’s cinematic reworking of *The Tempest*.

Writing on literary silences, Katrin Meise has persuasively argued that “[e]very silence is full of information”. As Meise observes, “[t]he information in silence is not auditory and thereby easily ignored”. And yet, “if we shift modalities [...], we discover that silence is anything but nothing”, for “[s]ilence speaks” (45). There is widespread agreement amongst Shakespeare scholars that Isabella’s lack of dialogue in *Measure for Measure*’s final act “speaks”, yet critics have long debated the precise nature and social significance of the “information” that her mute responses to the Duke convey. Though a wide variety of explanations have been proffered, opinions have fallen into two generalised camps. On the one hand, this Shakespearean heroine’s silence can be taken as a wilful, purposeful act of opposition or refusal. Barbara J. Baines, for example, submits that “Isabella does not lose, but only holds, her tongue; she is not silenced but, instead, chooses silence as a form of resistance to the patriarchal authority and to the male discourse within which this authority operates” (299). On the other hand, *Measure for Measure*’s concluding scene may more troublingly signal Isabella’s ultimate subordination via the gendered erasure of her female voice. As Daniel Salerno reminds us, there is, *contra* Baines, “another strain of criticism which sees Isabella [...] as a subdued female victim, finally ground down to inarticulate silence by the forces of patriarchal domination” (3–4). To this effect, provocatively comparing the “baffled actress who has run out of lines” at *Measure for Measure*’s end with the tongueless Lavinia of *Titus Andronicus*, Marcia Riefer proposes that “the gradual loss of [Isabella’s] personal voice during the course of the play [...] become[s], finally, a literal loss of voice” in the *dénouement* (167). Put otherwise, Isabella’s failure to speak can be interpreted in terms of (willing or unwilling) compliance rather than emphatic resistance to the demands of the Duke and the normative marriage economy. In what follows, I want to suggest that these polarised critical responses to what has been called the “excruciatingly loud silence” (Chamberlain 87) of Shakespeare’s Isabella in *Measure for Measure* provide us with a useful set of lenses through which to view the highly politicised and decidedly unconventional linguistic strategies employed by Eaton’s Liv throughout *The Sounding*.

Largely set on the picturesque Monhegan Island off the coast of Maine, *The Sounding* is awash with canny Shakespearean references. Its female protagonist, the thirty-something Liv, is (of course) actually an Olivia, and this onomastic allusion to *Twelfth Night* is not *The Sounding*’s only invocation of this play: at one point midway through the film, Liv’s near-drowned body is dramatically resurrected from the “blind waves and surges” of the ocean in the explicit pattern of Shakespeare’s Viola (*Twelfth Night* 5.1.227). *The Sounding*’s multifaceted Shakespearean affiliations are established much earlier than this, however. Liv’s

suggestive surname, Williams, also marks her as a Shakespearean creature, and the film's opening sequence shows this woman purposefully tearing poems out of a copy of Shakespeare's works – including Sonnet 136, in which the early modern author famously puns on the “Will” of their shared name. We witness Liv affixing this and other sonnets to scattered trees throughout the pine forest near her seaside home, as if silently declaring “these trees shall be my books, / And in their barks my thoughts I'll character” in imitation of *As You Like It's* Orlando (3.2.5–6). Another extended Shakespearean reference is brought to life during a rustic party presided over by Liv's terminally ill grandfather Lionel, which includes such entertainments as an amateur performance of the Ovidian Pyramus and Thisbe playlet from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. It is indisputably *The Tempest* that *The Sounding* most overtly channels, however. From childhood, the orphaned Liv has been raised by Lionel, a retired psychiatric professional. The relative isolation of their existence is emphasised in an early conversation that Lionel has with Dr. Michael Lande, a former mentee and protégé whom he has expressly asked to visit his island home. Sounding almost surprised by the appearance of this invited guest on his property, Lionel remarks “You've found us”. When Michael quips “you don't make it easy”, Lionel affirms “that's the idea”. The remote setting of their book-filled domestic enclave, the overtly paternalistic and pedagogically oriented nature of Lionel's relationship with his granddaughter, and Liv's relative social naiveté all work together to establish the duo as a modern-day Prospero and Miranda. Furthermore, having been fatefully summoned to Monhegan Island, Michael (who serves as Liv's emergent love interest) functions as an obvious equivalent to the fortuitously shipwrecked Ferdinand in this appropriation of *The Tempest's* basic plot.

Like Julie Taymor's cinematic adaptation of *The Tempest* (2010) with its famously gender-swapped lead, *The Sounding* is built around a central female character. Here, however, it is not Prospero/Prospera, but rather the Miranda-like Liv, played by Eaton herself, who dominates the screen. What is more, despite their clear parallels, in many ways, Liv's unusual relationship with language renders her a more dynamic and complex character than her Shakespearean progenitor. Liv is well-read, quick-witted, and the clear cultural beneficiary of her grandfather's careful tutelage. That said, from youth onwards, she has not spoken. Lionel confidentially explains his granddaughter's condition to Michael: “She was developing normally, and then one day she just stopped talking. She can speak, she's perfectly capable, but we haven't heard a word since”. Liv hums, she laughs, she uses hand gestures, she nods and conveys a wide range of emotions facially. She also creates visual artwork. And yet, while “her IQ's off the charts” and “her language comprehension [...]

superb” (at least according to her grandfather), Liv does not express herself verbally. Perplexedly attempting to describe this phenomenon to a professional colleague, Michael clarifies that Liv is “capable of making sounds, understanding words, but doesn’t make words in any capacity, verbal, signed, written”.

It is only her grandfather’s death from throat cancer partway through the film that finally prompts Liv to end her long years of verbal silence. In a key scene, as the weakened Lionel is reading Shakespeare aloud to Liv, his speech begins to falter. Seamlessly, Liv takes the book from her grandfather and, in her own unsure yet fully intelligible voice, begins to read from *The Merchant of Venice* where he left off. It is the loss of Lionel that precipitates Liv’s entry into the world of the speaking. However, when she does begin to express herself through verbal means, Liv’s mode of communication remains distinctly non-normative: she uses only Shakespeare’s English. Even when she starts talking, her output is curiously limited to a stream of pithy quotations drawn from *The Tempest*, *Twelfth Night*, *As You Like It*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Pericles*, *Richard III*, *King Lear*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth*, *The Winter’s Tale*, *Coriolanus*, *Hamlet*, *Measure for Measure*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Julius Caesar*, and *All’s Well That Ends Well*, amongst other Shakespearean texts. Michael, whom Lionel personally selected to protect Liv’s interests and act as her “advocate” so that she might “remain independent” after his death, is decidedly unnerved by this turn of events. Per his own medical training, though contrary to Lionel’s explicit wishes, Michael’s instinct is to pathologise Liv’s condition. It is thus that, fearing she will self-harm, he employs deceptive tactics to have her committed for psychiatric treatment in Portland, Maine. Coming to regret this too-hastily-made decision, however, Michael eventually sacrifices his own license to practise psychiatry in order to restore Liv to non-institutionalised freedom, and the film closes with the couple ambling about together, enjoying the natural splendours of Monhegan Island.

On one level, it is possible to interpret Liv’s linguistic trajectory from wordlessness to curated Shakespearean speech in *The Sounding*, à la Baines’s reading of Isabella’s silence in *Measure for Measure*, as an elective form of resistance against societal norms. In such an interpretation, the film celebrates radical individualism, with Liv’s never-ending web of quotations functioning productively as what theoretical feminists like Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray might describe as a variety of *écriture féminine*. This vein of thinking about Liv’s communication strategies certainly resonates with soundtrack’s inclusion of MILCK’s “Quiet”, a song that rose to international prominence as a politicised feminist anthem – giving rise to the popular hashtag #icantkeepquiet in the process – due to its associations with

the Women's March on Washington following the presidential inauguration of Donald Trump in January of 2017. Moreover, this dissident, resistance-oriented interpretation of Liv's storyline is the one indisputably endorsed in *The Sounding's* 2019 press packet. Promotional materials straightforwardly declare *The Sounding* to be about "otherness" (4, 5, 7) or "marginalization and difference" (6). It is a film, we learn, about "com[ing] into conflict with society's expectations", and, ultimately, it is a film about "revolt" (4). Above all, the materials collected in *The Sounding's* press packet emphasise that Liv is "an extraordinary woman who dares to live her own authentic life" and that her story shows what it means to "willingly choose individual authenticity" over conformity (5, 6). Analogous sentiments regarding Liv's triumph over adversity are echoed throughout the body of initial reviews that *The Sounding* generated following its spate of film festival appearances in 2017 and 2018. Eaton's work was characterised by one early viewer as "a film about silence, meaning, and the mystery of communication" as well as "the power of a woman's voice" (Chase). Another representative review – a piece which, fittingly, begins with a Shakespeare quotation of its own by citing Polonius's hoary adage "to thine own self be true" (*Hamlet* 1.3.78) – appeared under the summative headline "'The Sounding' makes a loud case for freedom, individuality" (Kristoff). Elsewhere still, *The Sounding* has been hailed as a "story of empowerment" bearing an *au courant* "message of refusing to accept a patriarchal definition of normality" (Tallerico).

A number of scenes in *The Sounding* itself would seem, at least at first blush, to lend credence to the above line of interpretation. Prior to his death, Lionel shares his own diagnosis of Liv's condition with Michael: "Olivia Williams is in sound medical and psychiatric health and has simply chosen not to speak. No further treatment required". As he explains, having "put her through the most extensive neurological psychological testing available", he came over time to recognise the error of this approach, which left Liv "depressed, withdrawn, self-destructive". Indeed, he describes his "greatest act as a doctor" as "the day [he] stopped trying to fix that girl". To the end, Lionel is insistent that "silence is a choice" for his granddaughter, and Liv's interactions with Michael affirm that she shares this opinion. In one early scene, Liv responds to Michael's direct line of questioning about why she does not speak by pulling out her trusty Shakespeare tome. Using a pencil to circle something on a page, she tears this leaf from the book and presents it to him. On it appear the famed words of Shakespeare's Cordelia: "What shall Cordelia speak? Love and be silent" (*King Lear* 1.1.62). By invoking this well-known dramatic antecedent, Liv thus frames her own silence in the face of questioning as a strategic rhetorical decision. Later, after she

begins speaking exclusively in Shakespearean quotations, Liv employs similar techniques to stress what she believes to be the elective nature of her non-normative linguistic strategies. To this effect, when Michael insistently enquires “why [she] w[as] silent for so long”, Liv’s reply melds a phrase lifted from Sonnet 121 with a snippet of Olivia’s dialogue from *Twelfth Night*: “I am what I am” (11), she insists, “Be that thou know’st thou art, and then thou art / As great as that thou fear’st” (5.1.147–48). When subsequently queried why she avoids using her “own words”, Liv fluently answers Michael, via *Titus Andronicus*, that she simply prefers to “wrest an alphabet” from this early modern author’s oeuvre (3.2.44). Quoting Portia from *The Merchant of Venice*, she scornfully tells Michael “I pray you know me when we meet again” after he first seeks her permission to treat her so-called communication disorder medically (4.1.416), and when, in a crucial moment near the end of the film, Michael demands “Are you able to speak normally?”, Liv once again reaffirms in borrowed words: “I am able. I will not”.

In a recent discussion of Shakespearean quotation in contemporary culture, Julie Maxwell has observed that “[t]he numerous possible characteristics of quotation – its invocation of an authority, its association-creation, recognisability, linguistic playfulness, extracted nature, high portability, shared status or sometimes elite credentials – make it a versatile tool” (216). To wit, as much as such quotation can be understood to be, “at its core, an act of creative appropriation”, depending on context, it can just as easily be said to function as “a kind of cultural ventriloquism” (Kirwan 247; Garber 663). Bearing this in mind, I here want to suggest that *The Sounding*’s nuanced treatment of speech, silence, and quotation is considerably more sophisticated than the tidy, summative statements in its press packet would allow. Indeed, in many ways, this film resists those same subversive readings of Liv’s communication as empowered resistance that both she and her grandfather advocate in their dialogue and that the film’s promotional materials likewise valourise. After all, it is impossible to escape the myriad of politicised implications that emerge when we consider that, when she does begin to talk, Liv’s new and “authentic” mode of speech (the very language through which she voices her alleged individualism) turns out to consist entirely of the recycled words of the very dead, very white, and very male Shakespeare, the premier icon of Western literary canonicity. In the remainder of this article, then, I want to investigate how the story of Liv’s linguistic development in *The Sounding* might be alternatively construed not as a narrative of radical resistance but as one of compliance – a narrative characterised by asymmetrical power relations in which this film’s female protagonist is rendered, as some

critics have argued of Shakespeare's Isabella, "inarticulate [...] by the forces of patriarchal domination" (to again borrow Salerno's phrasing).

As postcolonial readings of *The Tempest* regularly remind us, the sovereignty of Shakespeare's Prospero over his island kingdom is hotly contested, not the least by his reluctant subject Caliban, who accusatorily suggests, "This island's mine, by Sycorax my mother, / Which thou tak'st from me" (1.2.333–34). And it is not only Prospero and Caliban who feel the need to possess the island. Rather, each man in *The Tempest* who freshly encounters this paradisiacal outpost (including such figures as Gonzalo, Stephano, and Trinculo) is recognisably inspired by the self-same desire to master its alluring landscape and inhabitants. Arguably, much the same impulse palpably motivates the many males who surround Liv in *The Sounding*, though the object of their collective colonialist fantasies in Eaton's film is no literal island. Rather, it is the female mind.

We are primed to detect the film's central analogy between *The Tempest's* island and Liv's mind from the outset, for *The Sounding* begins with a disembodied voice – one that we soon learn to identify as Lionel's own – declaring, "Karl Jung said that science comes to a stop at the frontiers of logic, nature does not. She thrives on ground as yet untrodden by theory". Punctuated with the sounds of crashing waves and shots of the rugged Maine coastline (where the "frontiers" of sea and land meet), this quotation is complemented by Lionel's own assertion that Jung "was talking about the mind". Lionel's Jungian gloss is meaningfully paired with the audience's first glimpse of Liv, who appears in close-up profile. In a later scene, as Michael is growing closer to Liv, he echoes much the same sentiment, quoting Lionel in the process. "Music, mathematics, religion, it's all conceived right here in the mind", Michael pontificates, gently touching the silent Liv's temple for emphasis. Almost poetically, he continues,

And we still know almost nothing about it. Lionel called it the undiscovered country. When I first started in Portland, he said to me, "Forget about the known. We are explorers. Go quickly, after the unknown".

Michael spends much of *The Sounding* convinced that Liv is suffering from "bad wiring" (and must, in fact, be reminded at one point by his compassionate colleague Dr. Edward Knott that she is "not a car"). He is confident that existing scholarly "research [...] on adult selective mutes and other non-communicators" will definitively illuminate Liv's condition and, in turn, allow him to master the uncharted territory of her mind. "There has to

be a reason” for her atypical behaviour, Michael ruminates, and he justifies his defiance of her grandfather’s dying wish that she be subjected to “no evaluations, no sessions, no treatments” by reasoning that Lionel must have summoned him (“one of the few specialists with the expertise to help her”) “because deep down he was afraid he made the wrong decision in stopping Liv’s treatment”. It is not just Michael and the conspicuously male members of the psychiatric community that he represents who seek to colonise, map, and cultivate Liv’s mind, however. Indeed, though his methods and aims are often at variance with Michael’s, one of the most tangible characteristics that Lionel has inherited from the Shakespearean Prospero is his identity as “schoolmaster” for his female progeny (1.2.173).

In *The Tempest*, Miranda’s father is insistent that he has “done nothing but in care of” his “dear one”, while his blissfully “ignorant” daughter professes no desire “More to know” about the external world than he deigns to tell her (1.2.16–21). Shakespeare’s Prospero, a learned figure who is ever-consumed in “secret studies” and lauded as being “for the liberal arts / without parallel”, couches his ongoing private education of his daughter in terms of the “profit” that his “careful” cultivation of her mind will allegedly bring to her (1.2. 73–77, 173–75). In *The Sounding*, Lionel, too, takes a strikingly similar approach to his own pseudo-Miranda’s education. He has “raised Liv here on the island, home-schooled her”, as he proudly informs Michael. “I read to her every day”, Lionel brags, namedropping “Foucault, Emerson, P.G. Wodehouse, Shakespeare”. More than once, the film’s audience witnesses the grandfather and granddaughter engaged in just this activity, and it is clear that Shakespeare, in particular, forms a crucial pillar of their shared studies. What is also evident is that Lionel alone dictates their curriculum. In their first night-time reading scene, when Liv silently begs her own affectionate “schoolmaster” to read aloud to her from *As You Like It*, Lionel protests that he is tired of the text. Gently teasing Liv, he suggests her literary preference may mean that “there [is] an Orlando in [her] life” before turning the lesson’s subject definitively away from Shakespearean drama: “Let’s have some Blake”, he declares. Despite Lionel’s momentary rejection of *As You Like It* in this scene, the duo return to Shakespeare once more in their next – and final – nocturnal scene of reading, however, and we are left with little doubt that Liv’s love of this early modern author is an inheritance from her grandfather that he has vigilantly nurtured in her.

Under Lionel’s pedagogical direction, Liv has learned her Shakespeare well enough to quote from his venerable corpus at will. She also appears to have internalised Lionel’s clichéd belief (one that he admits his dearest friends have heard him utter “too, too many times”) that “all of life is in Shakespeare”. Her stream of quotation-filled speech following

Lionel's death is, then, a peculiar and hyper-literalised extension of the lessons that Lionel sought to impart to Liv in life. There is a sense in which Liv has proven a very good student, indeed, for she has allowed her mind to be tenderly colonised by her well-meaning grandfather's textual and hermeneutic programme – a markedly traditionalist programme in which only his own paternal voice and those of revered male authorities (Jung, Foucault, Emerson, Wodehouse, Blake, and, above all, Shakespeare) seem to be audible. *The Sounding* therefore asks us to consider the distinct possibility that Liv's non-normative modes of communication – her silences, her limitless quotations – are a direct byproduct of the particular brand of canonical education to which she has been subjected, however lovingly, by Lionel.

The Sounding's colonialist dimensions become only more pronounced when, following Lionel's death, the scene abruptly shifts from Monhegan Island to Portland Psychiatric Center. As much as Liv resembles *The Tempest's* Miranda at the opening of the film, she increasingly comes to look (and be treated) as a neo-Caliban during the time of her unwilling institutionalisation. "She's a biter" declares one of the police officers who arrives at her island residence and manhandles her into a waiting squad car as she is forcibly committed to the mainland facility. This is only the beginning of a process of dehumanisation that Liv endures over a period of several months, which includes frequent periods of seclusion as well as observation through a glass window by the professionals entrusted with her care. At times, her unconventional behaviour becomes explicitly performative, as when she enacts a hand-puppet rendition of a scene from *Macbeth* through the observation window for the benefit of a bemused nurse. "Maybe we should bring her on the road, make a bit of money", jokes a colleague (channelling Stephano and Trinculo) who enters just in time to catch the final snatch of Liv's show.

We would do well to remember that Miranda is not Prospero's only pupil in Shakespeare's play. Caliban, too, has endured his sovereign's tutelage and learned not to "gabble like / A thing most brutish", but rather to make his "purposes" clear to his colonisers, properly employing English "words that made them known" (1.2.358–60). As Caliban alternatively puts it (in a pointed critique of this so-called education), though he has been taught to communicate in Prospero's "language", his "profit on't / Is [that he] know[s] how to curse" (1.2.365–66). Much the same could be said for Liv: during her time in Portland Psychiatric Center, her increasingly confident and superficially defiant reuse of Shakespearean dialogue – dialogue implicitly problematised due to its status as Lionel's

intellectual legacy – includes, in fact, Caliban’s above accusation, which she saucily throws back at Michael on her fateful last night in the institution.

Beyond Miranda and Caliban, there are additional Shakespearean *dramatis personae* with whom the unwillingly institutionalised Liv might be productively compared, including *The Taming of the Shrew*’s Kate. For much of *The Sounding*, Michael is singularly focused on making Liv verbally identify herself. In fact, when he first apprehends her, Michael’s initial impulse is to ask “What’s your name?” We later witness him complaining to Lionel that the mysterious woman he met on the beach “wouldn’t tell me her name”, and in Michael’s second encounter with Liv he opens with “Hello, again. I didn’t catch your name”. Later, having been informed that “to get [Liv] out altogether” from Portland Psychiatric Center he needs to provide evidence of her “visible recovery” by getting her to “use her own words”, Michael remains fixated on this quest to make her name herself. “What’s your name?” he wheedles, and when she responds with the Shakespearean “Olivia”, he keeps pressing. “Your full name, Liv”, Michael doggedly insists as she continues to resist. Watching Michael as he tries to force specific verbiage from Liv’s mouth, one cannot help but be reminded of what have been aptly described as “Petruccio’s name games” in the penultimate act of *The Taming of the Shrew* (Werner 83). After all, this Shakespearean character is likewise determined to control the verbal utterances of a disenfranchised female, ultimately compelling Kate’s nonsensical identification of the moon as the “blessèd sun” and causing her to greet an “old, wrinkled, faded, withered” man erroneously as a “Young budding virgin” (4.6.18–19, 44, 38).

Perhaps even more troublingly, at other moments, it is *Titus Andronicus*’s tongueless Lavinia that Liv most closely seems to resemble. Upon her admittance to Portland Psychiatric Center, a doctor informs her, “According to Dr. Lande’s notes, you speak ‘Shakespeare’, and sometimes, if you become upset, you can’t remember it”. It is true: Liv is perceptibly ill at ease whenever separated from her trusty Shakespeare tome. Even when not directly reading from it, she seems to require physical proximity to Shakespeare’s written text in order to communicate in her borrowed language, and she goes so far as to scribble (with contraband pens) expedient quotations onto her hospital-issued clothing and even her own skin. As the medical professionals around Liv note, the photographic memory that she employs to recall Shakespeare’s words often “fails under stress”. It is thus that Liv’s obvious reliance on the works of Shakespeare to convey her thoughts and feelings eerily echoes Lavinia’s similar use of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* as she “quotes the leaves” of this book to communicate the details of her own Philomela-like violation (*Titus Andronicus* 4.1.50).

The painful Petruchio-and Kate dynamic between Michael and Liv comes to an abrupt halt when the former reaches something of an epiphany. Directly responding to Liv's impassioned Shakespearean reference to "the undiscovered country" (*Hamlet* 3.1.81), Michael muses,

That's Lionel's phrase, "the unknown mind". That's what he called it: "We are explorers. Go quickly after the unknown". [...] You're saying you're the explorer going after the unknown. The extreme choices, the silence, the Shakespeare. [...] Everything Lionel talked about, it's because of you. Going after unknown, new ways of being. Of course he didn't want me to treat you. He wanted me to learn from you.

Michael's eureka moment directly precipitates a further, frenzied outpouring:

Alright, I know your name now. Your name is Hamlet. Your name is Shylock. Your name is Rosalind. Your name is Caliban. Ariel. You're Romeo. You're Prospero. Cleopatra. Feste the Clown. Juliet. Portia. Banquo. Malvolio. Ferdinand. You're a fat friar with a double chin. You're all the Capulets and the Montagues. And your name's Olivia!

For his part, Michael promptly relinquishes his colonialist impulse to dominate Liv's mind, and he moves to release her from the Caliban-like captivity in which she has been held. For her part, like many a Shakespearean heroine before her – including Julia in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* or Hero in *Much Ado About Nothing* – Liv seems inexplicably, even bafflingly eager to forgive her male love interest for his severe transgressions against her. That said, the extent to which Liv continues to resemble both the unequivocally victimised Lavinia and the paternally manipulated Miranda as *The Sounding* draws to a close raises questions about her ultimate agency and the purported authenticity of her voice. To wit, while Michael may conveniently desist in his explicitly gendered colonialist endeavours to control Liv's mind, we are left with the uncomfortable implication at *The Sounding's* end that Lionel's cultivation of his relentlessly Shakespeare-quoting granddaughter may have been more lastingly successful.

The relationship of Prospero to his book(s) in *The Tempest* has been a recurring point of fascination in Shakespearean scholarship. As Caliban puts it, "without them / He's but a sot [...] nor hath not / One spirit to command" (3.2.94–95). It is little wonder, then, that Prospero values his "own library" of precious "volumes" more than any earthly "dukedom" (1.2.168–69). "I'll to my book" he says when he needs to "perform / Much business" of

social engineering on the island (3.1.95–97), and when Prospero “abjure[s]” his “rough magic” once and for all, he announces that he is also ready to “drown [his] book” (5.1.50–57). There is a sense in which the works of Shakespeare function as Lionel’s equivalent Prosperian book in *The Sounding*, and, far from being “drown[ed]” at the film’s end, this text is inherited by Liv, who not only cherishes it, but seems in some important way to *need* it to navigate the world around her, much as the brutally silenced Lavinia in *Titus Andronicus* must rely on the culturally authoritative text of the *Metamorphoses* to make herself understood.

It is also worth noting that Shakespeare’s Prospero is not just an avid scholar or powerful mage, but also a match-maker *par excellence*. In fact, his most pressing concern seems to be his own dynastic legacy, as it will be fulfilled via Miranda’s marriage to Ferdinand. Interpreters of *The Tempest* have often drawn attention to the influence that Prospero wields over his fellow characters’ actions and remarked the quasi-authorial – even metatheatrical – nature of this dramatic control. Lionel, too, takes an explicitly directorial role in *The Sounding* as he machinates the budding romance between Liv and Michael. This dynamic is epitomised in an early scene wherein revellers attending a party at Lionel’s house are persuaded to stage the inset play from *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Lionel, who dons a paper crown and wields a Prospero-like staff for the occasion, presides over the festivities, and it is he who is responsible for the casting. Significantly, like the Shakespearean Flute before him, Michael is initially unwilling to play the part of Thisbe in this entertainment, but he eventually acquiesces to Lionel’s “specific” request that he fulfil this role. Here, we find a miniaturised version of the two men’s broader relationship: Lionel has called Michael to the island to play Ferdinand to Liv’s Miranda in his own personal reworking of *The Tempest*’s dynastic romance. That Michael subsequently veers off script after Lionel’s death, temporarily failing to enact the part that has been established for him, is clear. To this effect, in yet another of *The Sounding*’s many *Tempest* allusions, Michael’s divergence from his predetermined role as Liv’s “advocate” when he institutionalises her is visually signalled by his discovery of an abandoned chess board when he returns to haunt Lionel and Liv’s empty island home. This spoiled game directly invokes the moment in Act 5, scene 1 of Shakespeare’s play when Prospero dramatically draws back a curtain to reveal Miranda and Ferdinand engaged in a cosy game of chess, thereby demonstrating to onlookers that he has successfully orchestrated the duo’s future marriage. Despite Michael’s temporary swerve, however, he begins finding his way back to Lionel’s intended plot at the point, roughly two-thirds of the way through *The Sounding*, when he picks up a copy of

Shakespeare's works. Michael subsequently renounces his scientific journals and increasingly adopts the literary curriculum that Lionel prescribed in life and that Liv continues to embody.

The well-trained Liv, too, evidently functions as an actor in her grandfather's posthumously unfolding dramatic work. As we evocatively learn, Lionel not only colonised his female progeny's mind with the stuff of prudently selected canonical texts, but he also taught Liv to dance. It seems appropriate, then, that Lionel has attempted to choreograph the future sequence of events that will determine her life's Miranda-like course. There is an important sense in which, by communicating exclusively in Shakespeare's English, Liv spends much of *The Sounding* quite literally performing parts found in the very book so poignantly bestowed upon her by her dying grandfather. This begs the question: could Liv, even if she wanted to, deviate from the male-authored, culturally revered, patriarchal script that she has been so explicitly handed?

In an earlier cinematic adaptation of *The Tempest*, *Prospero's Books* (1991), Peter Greenaway memorably experimented with speech and speechlessness to create what he describes in the screenplay as a "deliberate cross-identification between Prospero, Shakespeare and [John] Gielgud", the renowned Shakespearean actor who stars as Prospero in the film. Prospero, in Greenaway's conception, authorially "invents characters [...], writes their dialogue, and having written it, [...] speaks the lines aloud, shaping the characters so powerfully through the words that they are conjured before us" (9). In practice, this means that virtually all of the lines in *Prospero's Books* are delivered by Gielgud-as-Prospero, who "command[s]", as Chris Lawson phrases it, "a God-like omnipotence over the production as a whole" (142). This puppet-masterish dramatic control that Gielud-as-Prospero exerts over the film's other actors in is underscored as they mime to and are drowned out by the authority of his singularly audible voice. What I want to suggest, in closing, is that the sustained act of Shakespearean ventriloquism that features throughout Greenaway's adaptation of *The Tempest* directly anticipates the ending of Eaton's.

Commenting on the final wordlessness of Isabella in Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, Charles R. Lyons has observed that, despite her lack of dialogue, this heroine "remains a significant presence in the spectator's field of vision" at the play's end (124). The same is true of Eaton's Liv, who, following her release from Portland Psychiatric Center, is returned to an ambiguous silence in the final moments of *The Sounding*. Restored to her original environment, she is depicted standing at the seashore once more, and we witness her contentedly traipsing through Monhegan Island's untamed landscape with Michael in tow. But, once again, we do not hear her speak. What we do hear, however, is Lionel. His voice –

which blends with marked indistinction the words of his own will and testament with a direct quotation from Shakespeare's *Tempest* – is superimposed over these parting glimpses that we catch of Liv. The now-deceased Lionel says,

And for Olivia, I leave you the ocean and everything in it. The land and the worms and the wet stones. The sky and the wind and the light. Our home, our books. In short, our kingdom. And it is still less than you have given me. By living an unknowable, inexplicable life, you have taught me to believe. So have courage, Magpie.

This is seamlessly followed with,

Be not afeard. The isle is full of noises,
Sounds, and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not.
Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments
Will hum about mine ears, and sometime voices
That if I then had waked after long sleep
Will make me sleep again; and then in dreaming
The clouds methought would open and show riches
Ready to drop upon me, that when I waked
I cried to dream again.

(3.2.138–46)

Quite obviously, *The Sounding* closes by deferring to the same disembodied voice of masculine authority with which it began. The film's ending thus seems calculated to raise a host of unanswered, and perhaps deliberately unanswerable, questions about the cultural, linguistic, and personal control that the Prospero-like Lionel continues to exert over the Miranda-like Liv, even from beyond the grave. It has been said of silence that, "[l]ike the zero in mathematics, [it] is an absence with a function" (Glenn 4), and I would submit that Liv's final voicelessness, especially as paired with Lionel's disarmingly benevolent paternal bequest, leaves us not with a sense of conclusive resolution, but instead with a provocative cipher. What does the film's ultimate silencing of Liv signify? Has this been a tale of linguistic resistance and empowerment or one of inarticulacy and patriarchal domination? Are we meant to surmise that Liv has come full circle and returned to her initial state of muteness? Alternatively, will she continue to communicate only in a language of repurposed Shakespearean quotations? And could either of these options be properly characterised as fully elective or indisputably, unproblematically "authentic"? Like the final silence of *Measure for Measure*'s Isabella, the final silence that *The Sounding* itself imposes upon Liv at its close – even as it grants the now-ghostly, canon-citing Lionel the last word – thus invites multiple, conflicting interpretations that are troubled by the politics of gender, voice, and audibility.

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