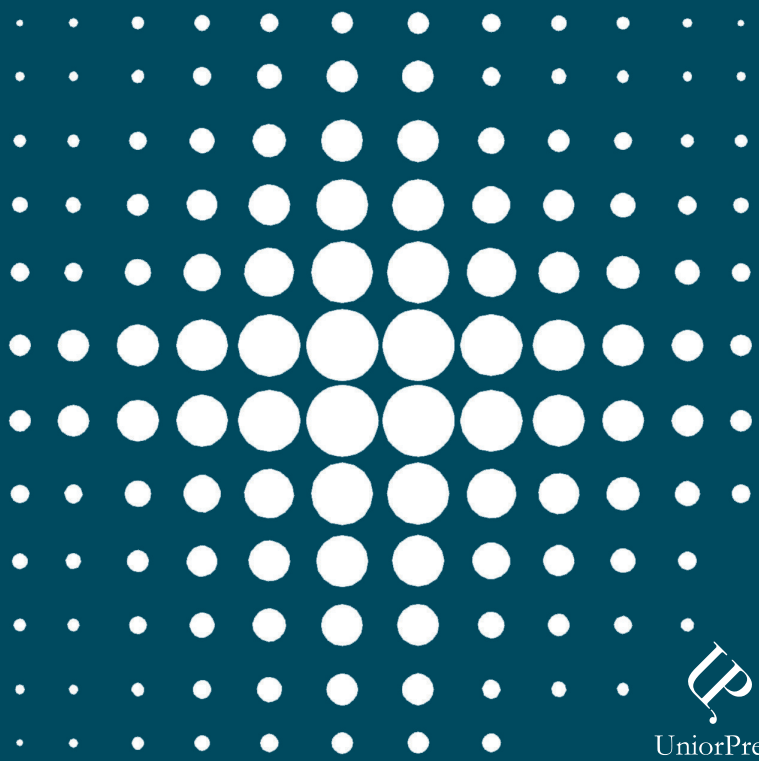
Taboo Language and (Im)politeness in Early Modern English Drama

edited by
Fabio Ciambella



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Edited by
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With an afterword by
Roberta Mullini

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Introduction: Taboo language and (im)politeness in early modern English drama

Fabio Ciambella*

This volume focuses on insults and swear words. It does so through methodological frameworks specific to historical pragmatics, pragmalinguistics, cultural studies, and English historical linguistics, among others. Variously called S-T words, SOTL (Swearing, Offensive, and Taboo Language), or simply taboo language, insults and offences are the object of the analyses conducted in the five chapters of this edited collection, with the aim of shedding some light on the complex interweaving relationship between contemporary theories and early modern English language.

According to scholars in pragmatics, the study of taboo language falls within the realm of impoliteness theory. Even preceding the late-twentieth-century exploration of S-T words and impoliteness, sociologists such as Goffman considered insults and offenses as threats to the addressee's self-image, or 'face', to use a Goffmanian term. Goffman's work laid the groundwork for face-based pragmatic models of (im)politeness, distinguishing between intentional and unintentional insults and offenses (1967, p. 14). Pragmaticians, building on Goffman's ideas, focused on intention as a key factor in identifying "genu-

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ine" impoliteness (Culpeper, 2021, p. 6). For instance, Bousfield's definition of impoliteness emphasises communication involving intentionally gratuitous and conflictive verbal acts that threaten face (2008, p. 72).

Although even Austin and Searle considered insults in their speech act theory,[1] in 1980, Lachenicht became the first linguist to analyse interactions where the speaker intentionally seeks to harm the hearer's facework. He developed a theoretical framework of impoliteness based on Brown and Levinson's politeness model, identifying four superstrategies of aggravating language:

1) indirect (off-record) aggravating language,
2) direct (bald on-record) aggravating language,
3) positive aggravating language, and
4) negative aggravating language.

Lachenicht's model faced challenges in both theory and methodology but underwent adjustments by Paddy Austin in 1990 and later by Culpeper in 1996. Culpeper's model, along with its subsequent developments, is widely accepted and authoritative in face-based impoliteness, especially from a diachronic perspective.

Culpeper categorises S-T words within positive impoliteness output strategies, which involve using strategies to damage the addressee's positive face wants (1996, p. 356). Positive face refers to the consistent self-image or personality claimed by interactants, including the desire for this self-image to be appreciated

[1] Although even Austin and Searle considered insults in their speech act theory, in 1980, Lachenicht became the first linguist to analyse interactions where the speaker intentionally seeks to harm the hearer's facework. He developed a theoretical framework of impoliteness based on Brown and Levinson's politeness model, identifying four superstrategies of aggravating language.

and approved of (Brown & Levinson, 1987,[2] p. 61). When a speaker intends to damage the hearer's self-image, positive impoliteness occurs, and taboo words, such as swearing or using abusive language, become potential strategies.

It is essential to note that what is considered insulting today may not have been perceived as offensive in early modern England. Cultural differences play a significant role in determining what is considered insulting, leading Jucker and Taavitsainen (2000, 2008) to develop a framework of the "pragmatic space of insults" (2000, p. 74) that accommodates diachronic variation. Their framework involves multiple dimensions, including formal level, semantics, context dependence, speaker attitude, and reaction.

Formal level:	ritual, rule governed	↔	creative
	typified	↔	ad hoc
Semantics:	truth-conditional	↔	performative
Context dependence:	conventional	↔	particular
Speaker attitude:	ludic	↔	aggressive
	intentional	↔	unintentional
	irony	↔	sincerity
Reaction:	reaction in kind	↔	denial, violence, silence

Fig. 1: The pragmatic space of insults,
according to Jucker and Taavitsainen (2000, p. 74)

[2] Brown and Levinson's book has a double copyright (© Cambridge University Press 1978, 1987). For practical reasons, in this volume it will be always indicated as 1987 when quoting from specific pages.

As illustrated by the two scholars,

> The first two dimensions concern the formal level of the insults. There are two dimensions involved: the ritual as rule-governed versus the creative as not following conventionalized patterns, and the […] typified and ad hoc insults. In some fictional genres insults have developed into speech acts in which a brief discourse has a typicalized form so that it schematically represents an entire speech event. […] On the semantic level, we distinguish between truth-conditional and performative insults. This distinction is useful in order to distinguish between slanders and slurs, on the one hand, and name-calling and expletives, on the other. […] Furthermore, we distinguish between conventionalized insults and particularized insults. […] Conventionalized insults are those which in normal circumstances are understood as insults by all members of a speech community, e.g. slanderous remarks, contemptuous remarks, name calling, and demeaning expletives. […] Particularized insults, on the other hand, are those which do not have this conventional force. They are more difficult to identify for the analyst because they depend on the reaction of the target to an utterance that does not have this conventional force. […] The dimensions on the next level are concerned with the attitude of the speaker. […] Insults may also be unintentional. […] insults are primarily perlocutionary. An utterance may have the effect of wounding the addressee even if the speaker did not mean to offend him/her. […] The last dimension concerns the reaction of the target. A personal insult requires a denial or an excuse, while a ritual insult requires a response in kind […]. Flytings may either end in actual violence or in silence, with which one of the contenders admits his inferiority. (2000, pp. 74–76)

Both Culpeper's model of impoliteness and Jucker and Taavitsainen's pragmatic space of insults draw explicitly on pragamitics and pragmalinguistics. Instead, in a sociocultural

framework of taboo words, Allan and Burridge (2006) present a slightly different model of S-T words. However, as highlighted by Ghezzi (this volume), Beville (this volume), and Ciambella (this volume), this model can be connected and integrated with Culpeper's impoliteness taxonomy and Jucker and Taavitsainen's diachronic perspective on SOTL. Allan and Burridge examine politeness and impoliteness in relation to orthophemism (straight talking), euphemism (sweet talking), and dysphemism (speaking offensively). In this context, dysphemism, representing bald on-record aggravating language, is the main focus of the following chapters. Dysphemisms are characteristic of various groups speaking about opponents, with examples ranging from political groups to feminists and male individuals discussing women and effete behaviours. Dysphemistic expressions include curses, name-calling, and derogatory comments aimed at insulting or wounding others. In Allan and Burridge's words:

> Dysphemisms are [...] characteristic of political groups and cliques talking about their opponents; of feminists speaking about men; and also of male larrikins and macho types speaking of women and effete behaviours. Dysphemistic expressions include curses, name-calling, and any sort of derogatory comment directed towards others in order to insult or to wound them. Dysphemism is also a way to let off steam; for example, when exclamatory swear words alleviate frustration or anger. To be more technical: a dysphemism is a word or phrase with connotations that are offensive either about the denotatum and/or to people addressed or overhearing the utterance. (2006, p. 31)

To summarise, the table below (Table 1), shows a comparison between Culpeper's impoliteness theory, Jucker and Taavitsain-

en's pragmatic space of insults, and Alan and Burridge's taxonomy of taboo words:

Culpeper (1996, pp. 356–357)	Jucker and Taavitsainen (2000)	Allan and Burridge (2006)
1) ald on record impoliteness – the FTA is performed in a direct, clear, unambiguous and concise way in circumstances where face is not irrelevant or minimised. [...] 2) *Positive impoliteness – the use of strategies designed to damage the addressee's positive face wants.* 3) Negative impoliteness – the use of strategies designed to damage the addressee's negateve face wants. 3) Sarcasm or mock politeness – the FTA is performed with the use of politeness strategies that are obviously insincere, and thus remain surface realisations. [...] 4) Withhold politeness – the absence of politeness work where it would be expected.	*Pragmatic space of insults:* *1)Normal level* *2) Semantics* *3) Context dependence* *4) Speaker attitude* *5) Reaction*	Socio-cultural framework of taboo language: 1) Orthophemism (straight talking) 2) Euphemism (sweet talking) 3) *Dysphemism (speaking offensively)*

Table 1: Comparison between the three SOTL frameworks described so far (emphases added)

* * *

Drawing also on the methodological frameworks described above, this edited collection of essays consists in five chapters

encompassing a time span from the late sixteenth century to the second half of the seventeenth. The case studies considered for the analyses carried out are early modern English plays. Although three of the chapters focus on Shakespearean texts (i.e., Ghezzi, Pasquali, and Beville), two of them offer insights into other playwrights' use of taboo language (in particular, John Fletcher in Ciambella's chapter, and William Wycherley in Rossi's essay). The chapters have been arranged according to the chronological order of composition/publication of the plays analysed, hence it is a mere coincidence that the three essays focusing on Shakespeare are numbers 1, 2, and 3, while essays 4 and 5 are dedicated to other playwrights. An afterword by Prof. Roberta Mullini, to whom we devotedly extend our heartfelt thanks, follows the five chapters and closes the collection.

In Chapter 1, by Chiara Ghezzi, the analysis of Shakespeare's *Richard III* unfolds as a metaphorical battlefield where words act as invisible, lethal weapons in a constant struggle for social power. Employing pragmatics as the chosen methodology, the paper examines the play's linguistic intricacies, focusing on (im) politeness, taboo, and the alternation between flattery, offense, and sarcasm. The essay provides an overview of existing studies, outlines the methodology, applies theoretical frameworks to specific scenes, and synthesises the material discussed. The analysis of Richard's interactions with female characters in the play reveals his adept manipulation of language, even in the face of curses and taboo references. The conclusion highlights Richard's eventual downfall and the shift in power dynamics, emphasizing the decisive impact of words on the verbal battleground. Overall, the essay offers a comprehensive exploration of linguistic strategies in *Richard III*, weaving together theoretical frameworks and specific scenes to unravel the play's hidden mechanisms and sociological context.

The second chapter, by Emma Pasquali, delves into the trial scene of *The Merchant of Venice* (4.1.163–396) from a pragmalinguistic perspective, with a particular focus on Portia's actions. The first section contextualizes the legal systems of 16th-century England and Venice within the play, adapting them for dramatic purposes. The methodology, drawing on theories by Austin, Grice, Searle, Quirk et al., Brown and Levinson, and Culpeper, is introduced in the second section. The third section outlines Portia's strategy through qualitative and quantitative analyses, emphasizing her disregard for legal customs and the breaking of societal taboos. Portia's atypical behaviour includes making value judgments before the sentence, pronouncing a fictitious ruling in Shylock's favour, and breaking three significant taboos during the trial. The data reveal a world described by Portia that is feasible but unreal, as she continuously flouts the maxim of quality to express her taboo-breaking strategy. The chapter concludes by highlighting the unconventional elements in the trial scene, such as Portia's disregard for legal customs and the unique hierarchy within the courtroom. Portia's strategy, deemed the only possible answer to the dramatic conflict over Antonio's bond, represents a clash between immutable law and a flexible, humane alternative model. Portia's unruly behaviour challenges traditional gender roles and hierarchical relations, demonstrating the inoperativity of taboos in the Shakespearean court. The pragmatic analysis emphasises the performative usage of language in realizing inoperative behavioural taboos, portraying Portia as a symbol of a woman capable of playing roles traditionally reserved for men.

Silencing others and promising to remain silent are the objects of Aoife Beville's study in Chapter 3. Considering Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* and *All's Well That Ends Well* as case studies, the essay underscores that both strategies should be seen as deliberate communicative choices, shedding light on the

complexities of speech and silence in the plays. Drawing on the interconnectedness of silence and taboo, Beville focuses on how characters establish, maintain, and strategically break interpersonal codes of silence. Both comedies utilise silence and secrecy as integral elements of their narrative structures, reflecting the political and social anxieties of the early modern era, which continue to resonate with modern audiences. The pragmatic analysis examines directives and commissives related to imposing or forbidding silence, as well as the complexity of skipping or denying turns in conversation. It challenges misconceptions about silence, rejecting a simplistic view that reduces speech and silence to a binary of power and powerlessness. Instead, the study reveals that characters strategically employ various forms of silence to challenge societal constraints, employing reticence as a tool of dissimulation, rhetorical instrument, resistance, and self-preservation. The essay concludes by emphasizing the multifaceted nature of silence in these plays and the need to consider pragmatic analyses in understanding the aesthetic and textual functions of silence. It advocates for bringing such analyses into the realms of performance and critical evaluation to deepen our appreciation of interactional silence within dramatic texts.

Fabio Ciambella carries out an analysis focuses on taboo language and (im)politeness in John Fletcher's Roman play *Bonduca*. According to the scholar, the taboo themes primarily revolve around the portrayal and treatment of three Briton women in the male military world depicted in the play. The chapter underscores taboo topics such as suicide, love, and the representation of powerful women, emphasizing the role of one male character, Caratach. The analysis sheds light on differences in conversational power and strategies between men and women in the play. Caratach emerges as a more effective leader than Bonduca, skilfully navigating the distinctions between public and private spheres. The study indicates that female characters are linguis-

tically defeated, aligning with their ultimate demise through suicide in the fourth act, leaving the stage to an all-male fifth act. The chapter also contends that Caratach's conversational power is reinforced by his mastery of both orthophemistic and dysphemistic (im)polite styles. Caratach's preference for direct and sharp communication, devoid of unnecessary euphemisms, underscores his linguistic prowess over Bonduca and her daughters. Also, the pragmatic perspective suggests that Caratach's survival in the war further solidifies his conversational dominance. In essence, the analysis posits that Caratach's linguistic superiority, expressed through both polite and impolite styles, contributes to his survival and success in the play. The pragmatic examination emphasizes the role of language in power dynamics, underscoring how Caratach's conversational strategies play a crucial role in the unfolding narrative of *Bonduca.*

Lastly, Valentina Rossi's study, taking readers directly to Restoration England, delves into William Wycherley's *The Country Wife* (1675) with a focus on taboo subjects related to sexuality, physical deformity, and gender discrimination. The methodology section introduces key concepts such as 'face' theory, Brown and Levinson's and Culpeper's super-strategies, and Haugh's research on teasing and jocular mockery. The subsequent analysis centres on dysphemism in the comedy, particularly examining utterances from characters Horner, Pinchwife, and Lady Fidget. Rossi argues that Horner, the protagonist, employs extensive negative impoliteness, directing it oddly towards himself rather than damaging the face of the hearer. His interactions with Sir Jaspar reveal a clever use of jocular mockery, aligning with the comedic spirit of Wycherley's work. This strategy consolidates Horner's position, allowing him to maintain a façade of impotence and pursue his goals discreetly, adding a humorous and vibrant tone to the play. In conflicts with Pinchwife, Horner's language becomes sharper, combining negative impoliteness

with bald on-recordness and swearwords. This shift underscores Horner's determination to offend his rival, revealing a nuanced use of linguistic strategies in different social dynamics. The analysis extends to Lady Fidget, whose adaptability between on- and off-record communication showcases her perceptiveness and strategic awareness. Lady Fidget emerges as a character who navigates social conventions and time effectively, satisfying her ego without overtly disrespecting societal norms. In conclusion, this chapter sheds new light on Wycherley's impudent style, emphasizing how his use of (im)politeness strategies, dysphemisms, and jocular mockery contributes to the comedic exploration of human follies and vices in *The Country Wife*.

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Compliments, insults, and broken taboos in Richard III's quest for power

Chiara Ghezzi*

"You taught me language; and my profit on 't
Is, I know how to curse."
(William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, 1.2.364–365)

1. Introduction

Imagine conversation like a battle. It is an unceasing and formidably dangerous chaos of straight thrusts and timely parries accomplished through invisible, yet mortal weapons: words. Hence, although fought with monologues, asides, stichomythic lines, or even strategical silences in lieu of swords, a verbal duel has winners and losers as well. In a battle, each side struggles to protect its life; in the case of a conversation, opponents try to protect their non-physical face, which is their social image of power and influence, from every threat uttered by the counterpart. If we consider words as not only being used to say something, but also able to act, just like the downward blows in fencing, then we must presume that words can indeed change the equilibrium of a discursive situation. The most suited methodology for the analysis and the classification of verbal exchanges and topical words in Shakespeare's *Richard III* is pragmatics, due to its attention to language as healing, hurting, and shaping reality.

Richard III is a history play about evil and power, but also the chronicle of a man who is fully aware of his linguistic capabili-

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ties; an imposter king who uses a fine wit, feigned politeness, notable puns, and his sharp tongue to mock his interlocutors. Richard, penalized by nature – which condemned him to be an inhibited cripple – manages to change his condition by making his speech his most powerful performance, exploiting his limits, and turning them into his greatest strength. Even though this play revolves around the anti-heroic deeds of the linguistically incomparable King Richard, it also focuses on queenly invectives and stichomythic flytings, depicting memorable female portraits of both vengeful Erinys, masters of rhetoric, and deceived wretches, flattered by language.

A powerful speaker knows how to benefit from his opponents' weaknesses, making them feel uncomfortable, playing with language, using both compliments and insults according to the circumstances, and even hauling the counterpart into the dangerous position of unmentionable topics. This paper aims to focus on the pragmatics of (im)politeness and taboo, enumerating the ways through which the alternation between flattery, offense, sarcasm, and forbidden words depicts the many faces of power. It represents a preliminary study of antonyms used as linguistic strategies.

This essay is divided into four sections. The first presents an overview of the state of the art about *Richard III* and the early linguistic analysis of Shakespearean Histories. It is mostly based on Urszula Kizelbach's studies about power and kingship in the Early Modern period (see Kizelbach, 2013, 2014).

In section two the methodology used for the textual analysis is delineated. The pillars of this research are Brown and Levinson's (im)politeness theories (1987) and Allan and Burridge's work on taboo language, euphemisms and dysphemisms (2006).

Section three is centred upon *Richard III*. The above-mentioned methodological approaches and pivotal concepts will be applied to Richard's confrontations with Lady Anne Neville,

Queen Margaret of Anjou, and Queen Elizabeth, highlighting the dialectal differences for each one of Richard's female counterparts. The section focuses on oxymoronic dialogues – considering Richard and his counterparts as opposing sides in terms of language, purposes, and semantic spheres – on the conflict between compliments and insults and on the employed linguistic strategies, such as mock politeness and unmistakable invectives. This section revolves around power, it enlists figures of speech, speech acts, and stage directions in order to understand how a verbal discussion could be compared to a physical battle.

Finally, there will be a synopsis of the discussed and classified material with the aim to demonstrate how a methodology that works on both argumentative strategies and theoretical structures of a text is fundamental to understand its hidden mechanisms, its historical context, and its sociological variables.

2. Early Pragmatic Approaches to *Richard III*

When studying *Richard III*, there is no scarcity of definitions. In *Henry VI, Part 3*, Richard compares himself to a basilisk, a titan, a hero, a Machiavel (3.2.187–193; Shakespeare, 2001) and he declares his aim to the audience, in a rare outburst of honesty: he will prove himself a villain, a devil, a murderer; he will wear the masks of a lover, a remorseful sinner, a virtuous saviour in order to obtain power. The multitude of veils under which he hides himself corresponds to different dialectic situations built by his own demiurgical influence. Thus, the main issue is not the definition of Richard's many roles but understanding who he really *is*. Nevertheless, as Kizelbach assumes, "what defines Richard III in Shakespeare's play is his acting, he is truthful only as an actor. The audience does not know what his real 'self' is: actually, we are not sure if Richard possesses any 'self' apart from his theatrical roles" (2014, p. 111).

King Richard's figure is deeply related to the ancient dichotomy of sacred and profane. His literary existence represents a warning of how dangerous falling into temptation could prove. That is precisely why Roberta Mullini (1983) first associated him with the medieval *vice*, one of the protagonists of the Morality Plays, in which the opposition between good and evil was meant to be educational to the audience. The *vice* – a superbly ironic and centralizing allegory derived from the Devil himself – soon became the well-known *villain*, an evil psychologically shaped character, an individual who masters speech and behaviour, opposing the hero in every play. From a linguistic point of view, Richard is also one of Shakespeare's most loquacious characters. He engages his enemies through cunning compliments and off-record, indirect threats, or he confuses them by adapting his rhetoric strategies to the circumstances, showing himself alternately submissive or relentless. He is the epitome of the histrionic actor.

Notwithstanding the legitimate interest in Richard as the King speaking blandishments to attain power, this paper also focuses on queens uttering curses to make Richard's power crumble.

In her recent research, Kizelbach, studying kingship and power, mingled together her literary knowledge with a historical pragmatic approach to investigate Shakespearean Histories. Kizelbach (2014) connects the masks worn by Richard to the sociological concept of face theorized by Ervin Goffman (1967), who describes everyday conversation as a quest for collective recognition. Goffman affirms that we perform several roles, according to our social situation, to take advantage of our circumstances and protect our *self*, be it hidden, visible, or mystified. Every speaker is willing to dissemble and pontificate, breaking every principle of conversational authenticity,[1] if only it would

[1] Paul Grice formulated the Cooperative Principle, which is an intuitive verbal behaviour at the basis of every conversation. It consists of four maxims in-

serve the purpose of protecting one's face, i.e., the idea of the self displayed in a social context, to show it in a good, polite light. As Lakoff says: "It is considered more important in a conversation to avoid offence than to achieve clarity" (1973, pp. 297–298) and it is important to keep a good, acceptable reputation. Goffman's definition of face perfectly matches with King Richard's politeness and ability to dissimulate his true self under a mask. From this viewpoint, Richard resembles any other contemporary man who needs to be acknowledged, legitimated, and entitled to power and consent by his interlocutors.

Applying a historical perspective to *Richard III*, Kizelbach traces an illuminated path of philological references that connects Shakespearean History Plays to existing Late Medieval kings and monarchies. In agreement with the ontological, hierarchical structure of the Great Chain of Being – which regulated the world-building through vertical relationships of difference and correspondence – during the Middle-Ages the king was defined as the superior creature on the human scale, equally compared to the Sun and to God. This proximity between the king and God appointed the human leader as "the Lord's Anointed", chosen by divine right, and his power was indisputable and absolute because it came from above (Kizelbach, 2014, p. 21).

Shakespearean kings demonstrate in a fictional world the real historical passage from a symbolic ontological pattern to a modern, performative political and sociological attitude.[2] The

stinctively respected by speakers: 1) Quantity: Make your contribution as informative as required; 2) Quality: Do not say what you believe to be false; 3) Relation: Be relevant; 4) Manner: Avoid obscurity of expression and ambiguity. Be brief. Be orderly (Grice, 1975, p. 69). For further information see Grice, 1975.

[2] Talking about the passage from the late Middle Ages to the early modern period, Alessandro Serpieri mentioned the epistemological fracture that meant an irrevocable split between the two periods. The ontological wound revealed

difference is thoroughly evident in the comparison between Richard and his theatrical predecessor Henry VI. Henry still personifies the medieval king chosen by fate, who believes in moral virtues directly derived from God. His nature of "elected man" makes him passive: he forgets to actively protect his face, making his political choices quite weak. On the contrary, Richard is fully identifiable with a new kind of king, the Machiavellian prince who deals with *Realpolitik*[3] (2014, p. 3). The Machiavellian king is more a materialist and a pragmatist than spiritual and virtuous; he governs pragmatically, without any ethical scruple; he knows when to be overtly impolite and when to use politeness as a power strategy. Richard does not reign as though his supreme role were taken for granted; he actively pursues his goals through dissimulation.

3. Methodology

There are some basic concepts that must be underlined, albeit briefly, in order to understand the analytical part of this paper, which focuses on relevant segments from *Richard III*.

As noted above, pragmatics is a multidisciplinary linguistic methodology particularly effective when applied to literary

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the linguistic conflict between an old *symbolic model* of the world based on given, passive knowledge, and a modern *syntagmatic model* of the world which focused on the countless possibilities of human wit. The first model referred to a dogmatic language which was *motivated* and unchanging; it came from the high spheres of ecclesiastical power. The second showed the abilities owned by men, who could use an *arbitrary* language to investigate the truth on their own without any reference or pre-established knowledge. Thus, the epistemological fracture marked a new awareness in every branch of wisdom and a new, performative behaviour by men who were now able to change the unchanging. For further information see Serpieri, 1985.

[3] "A system of politics or principles based on practical rather than moral or ideological considerations" (*OED*, n.).

texts with a sound association to natural speech. Pragmatics being the study of language in context, linguistic implicatures, and interlocutors' behaviour, is made fruitful through its application to what Jonathan Culpeper and Merja Kytö called "speech-related genres" (2010). Genres like drama allow the reconstruction of a contextualized speech with a reliable resemblance to everyday language, making a discursive analysis of historical texts possible.

When engaged in a dialogue, the speaker tries to uphold his own convictions, directing the conversation towards a soft ground of safe topics. The main purpose will always be the preservation of the speaker's face or, at least, the struggle to keep a virtual balance between the speaker's and the hearer's faces. As Goffman specifies, face has a sociological meaning dealing with public recognition and social image; the definition is further split into *positive* and *negative face*. Positive face relates to the desire to be approved and appreciated by others, while negative face deals with freedom of action and one's will not to be interfered with. Hence, discursive politeness is seen as an essential, rational attribute displayed to attend to others' wants and needs during a well-mannered, civilized conversation. According to both Lakoff (1973), and Brown and Levinson (1987), politeness is a means for conflict avoidance and can be considered both as a shared behaviour and as an individual strategy. Since conversation is here compared to a physical battle, jabs and misdeeds must be expected. Thus, politeness can be defined as "the velvet glove to soften the blow" (Watts, 1992, p. 47).

> [P]oliteness is a form of social behaviour encompassing both linguistic and non-linguistic activity; […] it is a skill which, if acquired, is to be used in a rational, premeditated fashion to achieve very specific aims; […] its principal aim is the enhancement of *ego*'s self-esteem and his/her public status in the eyes of *alter* with a supplementary aim of enhancing *alter*'s self-es-

> teem; […] it demands a subtle interpretation of the social context in which it is to be used. (1992, p. 45)

Also:

> Polite language can be understood as the language that shows respect and consideration, used when one tries to avoid being too direct in conversation, the language composed of formulaic polite expressions ("thank you", "please"), and finally, the language expressing social distance, hypocrisy or dishonesty. (Kizelbach, 2014, p. 161)

The best way to break one's expectations in a context of silently negotiated cooperation and cause distress for a purpose, which is generally self-centred and detectable through speech implicatures, is flouting politeness theory by mentioning forbidden topics, swearing, cursing, and using sarcasm. Thus, in contrast with politeness, impoliteness refers to a negative disposition, a violation of the conversational norms, employed to create distress whether it be intentional or accidental, real or mocked.

> Impoliteness is a negative attitude towards specific behaviours occurring in specific contexts. It is sustained by expectations, desires and/or beliefs about social organisation, including, in particular, how one person's or a group's identities are mediated by others in interaction. Situated behaviours are viewed negatively – considered "impolite" – when they conflict with how one expects them to be, how one wants them to be and/or how one thinks they ought to be. Such behaviours always have or are presumed to have emotional consequences for at least one participant, that is, they cause or are presumed to cause offence. (Culpeper, 2011, p. 23)

Although it can be assumed that speech acts have intrinsic politeness or impoliteness values, the discursive context of those same utterances allows their interpretation as rude, kind, or even mocking. The context of conversation is influenced by three *sociological variables*, as stated by Brown and Levinson

(1987, p. 74): social distance, relative power, and ranking of imposition. These variables deal with participants' rate of familiarity, their ability to impose their own will, and the risk factor depending on whether said imposition is possible due to discursive circumstances.

Politeness and impoliteness can also interact and be associated with the concepts of what Keith Allan and Kate Burridge (2006) call *euphemisms* and *dysphemisms*. While neutral linguistic expressions are easily classified as *orthophemisms* – meaning a more formal and direct language – marked utterances and behaviours are either "sweet talking" or "speaking offensively" (p. 29).

A euphemism is usually "more colloquial and figurative (or indirect) than the corresponding orthophemism" (p. 33). It deals with courteous, attentive language including compliments and intentionally kind expressions. On the other hand, a dysphemism is unquestionably more marked with respect to its counterpart, it being ostensibly harsh, rude and offensive. As a result, dysphemisms are easily related to impoliteness and, more than that, to taboo language and deliberate insults:

> [D]ysphemism is the opposite of euphemism and, by and large, it is tabooed. Like euphemism, it is sometimes motivated by fear and distance, but also by hatred and contempt. […] Dysphemistic expressions include curses, name-calling, and any sort of derogatory comment directed towards others in order to insult or to wound them. […] a dysphemism is a word or phrase with connotations that are offensive either about the denotatum and/or to people addressed or overhearing the utterance. (p. 31)

The abovementioned definitions also include what Allan and Burridge denominate *euphemistic dysphemisms* and *dysphemistic euphemisms*: the former referring to clearly euphemistic expressions with a dysphemistic meaning, the latter dealing with dysphemisms which are actually euphemisms, such as banter, which is also classified as mocking impoliteness.

Impoliteness and offensive language are always linked to the emotional sphere, to an instinctive, even irrational reaction and, though dysphemisms and taboo are boldly disrespectful, there is a strong connection between impoliteness and taboo words, the latter being an aggravation of impolite language. As Culpeper mentioned:

> Like impoliteness generally, language is taboo when it conflicts with what people expect in a particular context, or what they desire or think should be the case. In addition, taboo language has negative emotional consequences for at least one participant. Taboo language, then, is a subgroup within impoliteness. [...] It is possible to achieve impoliteness with language without saying anything taboo. [...] Taboo language [...] is a matter of adding aggravating affront to impoliteness. (Culpeper, 2019, pp. 2–4)

A taboo is a form of prohibition which is socially recognized and organized in order to leave sensitive topics untouched, namely body, bodily functions, sex, death, religion[4], and so forth. Taboos are defined as such according to a certain context, place, and time. The employment of offensive language, including swearing, cursing, insults, and maledictions, usually breaks established social proscriptions in a more or less foreseeable way with a more or less declared intention of harming, injuring, or disarming someone else and his face. As pointed out above, the effectiveness of broken taboos results from specific power and affective relations among those who take part in a conversation.

[4] Censorship about religious matters in Great Britain dates back to the Tudor and Stuart eras. When the Reformation first arrived in England, along with the need to contain political revolts, there was a specific attention towards the suppression of licentious behaviours, outrageous talk and, of course, punishment for those who did not observe the Ten Commandments. Hence, in many Early Modern plays, references to the order of the sacred are remodelled and mystified to avoid censorship (for example *zounds* for *God's wounds* and *Marry* instead of Christ's mother's name). For further information see Allan & Burridge, 2006, pp. 13–17.

The entry for taboo in Geoffrey Hughes' *Encyclopedia of Swearing* states:

> *Taboo* generally describes that which is unmentionable because, on a hierarchical scale, it is either ineffably sacred, like the name of God, or unspeakably vile, like cannibalism or incest. [...] Linguistically taboo is rooted in word magic, especially in the belief that certain forces and creatures cannot or must not be named. These have come to include a great range such as the name of God, the Devil, death, damnation, disease, madness, being crippled, the varieties of excretion, and copulation, and in some societies, being fired, being poor, being fat, having a humble occupation, or references to underclothes. (2006, p. 462. Emphasis in the original)

Taboo words and topics are aggravated impolite, dysphemistic expressions employed in a conversation to shatter its equilibrium; they are directly ascribed to the right cerebral hemisphere, the part of the human brain that deals with anger, sadness, frustration and each and every strong, barely restrained emotion. The rhetoric expedients employed to restrict this unhinged self are classified as politeness or impoliteness strategies.

4. (Im)politeness and Taboo in *Richard III*

The use of compliments, insults and taboo words as power strategies is particularly fitting to the purpose of this paper, which tries to analyse the display of different degrees of royal authority. In the following paragraphs the aforementioned pragmatic concepts will be contextualized through the analysis of three selected passages from *Richard III*. Each text revolves around a dialogue and a specific couple, with King Richard being the leading character.

'Performative' is a relatively good definition for Richard's ability to turn his disadvantage into an unexpected favourable strategy: Richard can change the surrounding reality using words; he makes his apologies and his compliments seem real even when he

is lying, adapting his role to the disposition of the counterpart. "His acting consists in calculated changes of mood [that] are unpredictable" (Kizelbach, 2013, p. 97). That being so, Richard is the first Shakespearean character who marks the passage from "an ontological/referential" to "a relativistic/self-referential view of truth and language" (Del Villano, 2016, p. 71), demonstrating that every discourse, every debate, every dialogue has become dangerous and tricky because "everything is potentially falsifiable" (p. 74).

4.1 Wooing Anne

Since the very beginning of the play, Richard knows how powerful he is. Due to the fact that he's acutely self-aware of who, or *how* he is ("I, that am curtailed of this fair proportion, / Cheated of feature by dissembling Nature, / Deformed, unfinished, sent before my time / Into this breathing world, scarce half made up, / And that so lamely and unfashionable / That dogs bark at me as I halt by them – [...] I am subtle, false, and treacherous". 1.1.18–23, 37; Shakespeare, 2009), he is also a professional when crafting himself, hiding his sheer depravity and his true purposes under misleading masks.

Act 1 Scene 2 opens with a funeral procession. Richard's decision to seduce Lady Anne Neville to secure his quest for the crown takes place off-stage and this resolve proves quite a challenge. The funeral is a fundamental feature to prove Richard's ability to prevail despite the aggravating circumstances of having directly *on stage* the proof of his aberrating conduct. Richard has recently killed Edward of Lancaster and Henry VI, Anne's late husband and father-in-law respectively; Henry's body, in particular, is right there behind them during the whole wooing scene. Thus, Anne hates him to a fault, and she uses a diverse range of taboo words and bold impoliteness strategies to make it clear:

> [Anne] utters conventional set phrases that are characteristic of the language of the elegy. Anne's oration abounds in apos-

> trophes, deictic gestures, ritualistic repetitions, and her speech can be classified as self-address. [...] She soon turns to cursing Richard, the perpetrator of both murders, and her lament, which is very official in tone and based on set phrases, acquires the form of a personal imprecation that is accompanied by emotional outbursts. (Kizelbach, 2013, pp. 92–93)

Along with the other Margaret of Anjou and Elizabeth Woodville, Anne compares Richard to a variety of demons and filthy animals, placing him into a semantic world of profane references, while she is referred to as a heavenly creature, marking their existence as completely antithetical beings:

RICHARD
Sweet saint, for charity, be not so curst.
ANNE
Foul devil, for God's sake hence, and trouble us not, — Taboo language: cursing/positive impoliteness
For thou hast made the happy earth thy hell,
Filled it with cursing cries and deep exclaims.
If thou delight to view thy heinous deeds,
Behold this pattern of thy butcheries.
– O gentlemen, see, see dead Henry's wounds → Taboo topic: reference to Henry's death and Richard's responsibility
Open their congealed mouths, and bleed afresh.
– Blush, blush, thou lump of foul deformity,
For 'tis thy presence that exhales this blood
From cold and empty veins where no blood dwells.
Thy deeds, inhuman and unnatural,
Provokes this deluge most unnatural.
– O God! Which this blood mad'st, revenge his death.
Either heaven with lightning strike the murderer dead,
Or earth gape open wide and eat him quick,
As thou dost swallow up this good king's blood,
Which his hell-governed arm hath butchered.
(1.2.49–67)

In their first exchange the cardinal taboo expressions are clear. Anne not only refers to Richard as a "foul devil", "lump of foul

deformity", "hell-governed arm", making bold curses in her surge of anger against Richard, but she also clearly indicates him as Henry's assassin. Richard is rendered the sacrilegious, devilish murderer out of place in the sacred, untouchable space of a funeral, talking inappropriate pleasantries to his sanctified counterpart.

Moreover, Anne's speech acts are usually expressives[5] with lead imperative verbs, such as "behold" and "blush", corroborated by the use of the degrading second person pronoun *thou*. On the other hand, Richard employs the ennobling pronoun *you*[6] until the very end, praising Anne's positive face, mimicking awe and deference, as in the following passage:

RICHARD
Lady, you know no rules of charity,
Which renders good for bad, blessings for curses.
ANNE
Villain, thou knowst nor law of God nor man
No beast so fierce but knows some touch of pity.
RICHARD
But I know none, and therefore am no beast.
ANNE
O wonderful, when devils tell the truth!

Taboo language: positive impoliteness, association with animals and infernal beings

[5] According to Culpeper & Haugh (2014, p. 167), speech acts can change over time. While in the early modern period curses were considered "a type of declaration" with a perlocutionary force able to induce an effect and change the balance of a conversation, today insults are classified as expressives conveying the speaker's feelings. This shift in speech act type is linked to the "general process of semantic change towards increasing subjectivisation".

[6] For further information about the use of *you* and *thou* in this scene, see Barber, 1981; Jucker & Taavitsainen, 2003.

RICHARD
More wonderful, when angels are so angry.
Vouchsafe, divine perfection of a woman
Of these supposed crimes, to give me leave
By circumstance, but to acquit myself.
ANNE
Vouchsafe, diffused infection of a man,
Of these known evils, but to give me leave
By circumstance, to curse thy cursed self
RICHARD
Fairer than tongue can name thee, let me have
Some patient leisure to excuse myself.
ANNE
Fouler than heart can think thee, thou canst make
No excuse current but to hang thyself. (1.2.68–84)

Anaphoric flyting

Seeing how Richard compares her to an angelic creature, Anne should render "good for bad, blessing for curses", while she unleashes her wrath with a series of antonomasia expressions.[7] Their back and forth, what Richard himself later calls "encounter of our wits" (1.2.118), looks a lot like a medieval flyting, with prompt responses and anaphoric, symmetrical structures similar to ritual insults as between warriors or enemies in old poetry:[8] "Vouchsafe, divine perfection of a woman" against "Vouchsafe, diffused infection of a man"; "Fairer than tongue can name thee" opposed to "Fouler than heart can think thee"; "excuse

[7] Antonomasia is a figure of speech in which a common noun is used instead of a proper noun due its similar characteristics.

[8] Usually performed at court, recorded in chronicles, posted in public squares, and mimicked in poems (e.g., *The Owl and the Nightingale*, *Beowulf*), flyting referred to an exchange of insults conducted in verse. It generally involved two poets performing a fast-paced ritual conversation also as a form of entertainment. For further information see Parks, 1986.

myself" versus "hang thyself".[9] Anne employs derogatory terms – derived from fierce emotions – in order to prove her superiority and demolish and debase Richard, defining him according to all the vilest semantic spheres of Shakespeare's period: demons, beasts, monstrosities. Her unkindness is better expressed by the use of anaphoric verses, ritualistically reiterated, and of skilful metaphors, i.e., the use of unflattering comparisons to animals and vicious creatures,[10] which was a widespread rhetoric practice in the Early Modern period.[11]

ANNE
And thou unfit for any place but hell.
RICHARD
Yes, one place else, if you will hear me name it.

[9] For further information about Anne and Richard's conversation as made of stychomithic lines, see Mullini, 2001.

[10] According to Kertzer, the rhetoric of insults and the use of figurative language "sinks into the depths of physicality, where it becomes gloriously loathesome by tapping sources that are at once vigorous and foul: the body, beasts, disease, soil, procreation. Mikhail Bakhtin call this nether world the 'bodily lower stratum of grotesque realism'" (1994, p. 55).

[11] As Hughes points out, starting with the Reformation, the vocabulary of abuse was drawn from categories such as religion, crime, demonology and animals (1998, pp. 91–92). The reference to vile beings is part of that "gamut of vituperation" in which language is used in original invectives meant to demean the opponent (p. 109). Following the Puritans precepts during the Renaissance, the need for verbal suppression resulted in the formulation of mutilated, ingenious alternatives to religious swearing and in a fundamental shift from religious to secular swearing (p. 102). Foul dramatic language dealing with animals, demons, bodily functions, and sexual innuendos was favoured in order to avoid the censorship of the Master of the Revels.

ANNE
Some dungeon.
RICHARD
Your bedchamber. → Taboo topic: reference to sex
ANNE
Ill rest betide the chamber where thou liest.
RICHARD
So will it, madam, till I lie with you. (1.2.111–116)

This is the turning point in Richard's strategy, introducing the ultimate disturbing taboo[12] that could jeopardize his devious plan. Until now, Richard's mere presence has been the greatest broken taboo, since he's standing on holy soil with his despicable being, using sweet talking when he's the overt murderer in front of his victims. Meanwhile, Anne's curses are predictable puns in a heated confrontation.

By mentioning a bedchamber Richard makes his first impolite *faux pas*, since he is overtly referring to sex and intimacy, the expression being a euphemistic dysphemism: it seems courteous while being implicitly perturbing.

Richard knows that he is risking his entire farce; his innuendo is tentative and dangerous as it is sustained by the use of *you*. In this sequence, Anne and Richard are more distant than ever, with Anne having more relative power than Richard: he slaugh-

[12] Taboo topics change according to context, class and period. The forbidden meaning of a particular word is rooted in the coils of time. In general, taboos arise from the need not to hurt or offend someone's face and sensitivity, thus justifying the link with the use of linguistic (im)polinesess strategies. While in Shakespeare's period sensual innuendos, death and incest were the greatest taboos, the Bard was both ingenious and audacious in dealing with them. The only exception was represented by religion, which was approached trough 'minced oats' – elusive excisions of the sacred term – in order to avoid censorship. For a list of the taboo topics considered in this contribution see Hughes, 2003, pp. 462–464.

tered her loved ones, and she has all right to attack and deflate him and his face. That is why Richard is so wary and mock polite and uses hedging as a strategy to redress Anne's blunt insults while hinting at a scandalous sensual encounter.[13]

Once the most difficult part has been spoken, Richard easily turns to the intimate pronoun *thou*, used with subordinates, but also among peers. He tries to overcome the distance between them by speaking his heart, feigning meekness and, while Anne's last insults are intended to unsettle his resolve ("hedgehog", "homicide", "fouler toad"), the slow, but significative progression of her reactions – noted in the text as performative fragments – prove the fading of her mourning anger. Even when Richard gives her his sword to end his life, she hesitates until the final surrender, when she even wears his ring ("Look how my ring encompasseth thy finger". 1.2.206):

> *She spits at him.*
> *She looks scornfully at him.*
> *He [kneels and] lays his breast open, she offers at [it] with his sword.*
> *She falls the sword.* (Shakespeare, 2009, pp. 159, 161, 162)

Throughout this passage insults and compliments balance each other in a fine duel. While impoliteness is used consciously and roughly, euphemisms and sweet talking are Richard's main strategy to make his prey forget his awful "wicked deed" (1.2.105). Furthermore, the reiterated euphemisms in the form of metaphors – such as references to Anne's celestial beauty – are the trump card of the dialogue. Broken taboos led Richard to his victory.

[13] For further information about hedging and redressive actions in Anne's wooing scene, see Mullini, 2012.

4.2 Enduring Margaret

Margaret of Anjou is the unrelenting, screaming banshee of the play. Queen to the murdered Henry VI and mother to Edward of Lancaster, Margaret is a prisoner in what once was her own court, dealing with bitter hatred and imposed solitude.

> QUEEN MARGARET
> My charity is outrage, life my shame,
> And in that shame, still live my sorrow's rage. (1.3.276–277)

She describes herself as a "prophetess" (1.3.300), casting dark curses upon everyone that has ever opposed or humiliated her. Her maledictions and anathemas are memorably harsh and shrewdly incisive, her lines being the most dysphemistic of the whole tragedy. Margaret also makes use of many scenic devices, such as *asides* and *eavesdropping*, which serve as outlets for her rage. Though her resentment is mostly aimed in Richard's direction, their exchange happens in the middle of a wider conversation, in one of the rooms of the palace, where many noblemen have gathered together.

Right before they even come into contact, Margaret uses all sorts of blunt dysphemisms to address Richard, as a "devil" (1.3.117), "murderous villain" (1.3.133) and "cacodemon" (1.3.143). She does not even once turn polite or feign courtesy for a purpose, since she has nothing left to lose.

> QUEEN MARGARET
> [...]
> – Ah, gentle villain, do not turn away.
> RICHARD
> Foul wrinkled witch, what mak'st thou in my sight?
> QUEEN MARGARET
> But repetition of what thou hast marred;
> That will I make before I let thee go
> RICHARD
> Wert thou not banished on pain of death?

Taboo language: cursing/positive impoliteness

QUEEN MARGARET
I was, but I do find more pain in banishment
Than death can yield me here by my abode.
A husband and a son thou ow'st to me;
– And thou a kingdom; – all of you, allegiance.
This sorrow that I have, by right is yours,
And all the pleasures you usurp are mine.

→ Taboo topic: reference to death and murder

RICHARD
The curse my noble father laid on thee
When thou didst crown his warlike brows with paper,
And with thy scorns drew'st rivers from his eyes,
And then to dry them, gav'st the Duke a clout
Steeped in the faultless blood of pretty Rutland –
His curses then, from bitterness of soul
Denounced against thee, are all fall'n upon thee;
And God, not we, hath plagued thy bloody deed.
(1.3.162–180)

Taboo topic: reference to infanticide

Richard and Margaret hate each other. They do not redress their harsh words, with Richard calling her "foul wrinkled witch" and Margaret using the oxymoronic "gentle villain", here presented as a euphemistic dysphemism, since 'gentle' seems a compliment, while being associated with an insult. There is an extreme distance between them as they fight for supremacy, both using the pronoun *thou* aiming at demeaning the counterpart.

In this passage Richard and Margaret are both metaphorically compared to hellish beings. While Margaret is accusing Richard of regicide, Richard adds insult to injury, placing Margaret in the taboo sphere of infanticide, her being the instigator of young Rutland's homicide[14] in *Henry VI Part 3*. Not

[14] Edmund, Earl of Rutland was Richard Plantagenet's fourth son and, although his brother Richard was younger, Shakespeare made him the youngest for theatrical purposes in *Henry VI, Part 3*. He was presumably

surprisingly, Margaret is often associated with witchcraft and black magic. While taboos are generally dealt with through the pragmatic strategy of substitution, i.e., euphemisms, these dangerous references are uttered on-record by both Richard and Margaret, further showing the clash of their powerful personalities.

RICHARD
Have done thy charm, thou hateful withered hag.
QUEEN MARGARET
And leave out thee? Stay, dog, for thou shalt hear me.
If heaven have any grievous plague in store
Exceeding those that I can wish upon thee,
O, let them keep it till thy sins be ripe,
And then hurl down their indignation
On thee, the troubler of the poor world's peace
The worm of conscience still begnaw thy soul;
Thy friends suspect for traitors while thou liv'st,
And take deep traitors for thy dearest friends;
No sleep close up that deadly eye of thine,
Unless it be while some tormenting dream
Affrights thee with a hell of ugly devils.
Thou elvish-marked, abortive, rooting hog,
Thou that wast sealed in thy nativity
The slave of nature and the son of hell;
Thou slander of thy heavy mother's womb,
Thou loathed issue of thy father's loins,
Thou rag of honour, thou detested –
RICHARD
Margaret.
QUEEN MARGARET
Richard!

} Taboo language: cursing/positive impoliteness, repetitio of derogatory remarks

killed at seventeen in the Battle of Wakefield (1460), during the War of the Roses.

RICHARD
Ha?
QUEEN MARGARET
I call thee not.
RICHARD
I cry thee mercy then, for I did think
That thou hadst called me all these bitter names } Sarcasm/mock politeness
QUEEN MARGARET
Why, so I did, but looked for no reply.
O, let me make the period to my curse.
RICHARD
'Tis done by me and ends in 'Margaret'. → Sarcasm/mock politeness
(1.3.214–238)

However, Richard faces these broken taboos like they're nothing at all. While speaking awful things has the general purpose of hurting someone, Richard appears quite unfazed by this outburst of negative energy and, for this reason only, he's much more powerful then all his plainly impolite opponents. When Richard interrupts Margaret's curse, he uses his other weapon, a mocked polite sarcasm. He twists Margaret's words to his liking, directing her own heated maledictions directly at her. Richard accepts her as a necessary evil and does not indulge himself in his usual intricate persuasions, having no purpose in flattering or conquering her favour.

4.3 Convincing Elizabeth

In Act 4 Scene 4 Richard is finally king of England at the cost of countless murders and deceptions. Elizabeth Woodville, former queen and married to Edward IV, has lost her husband, but also her two children, held in the Tower of London and slaughtered on the orders of Richard himself. Now a widower, Richard wants to consolidate his power by marrying his niece – Elizabeth's daughter – thus he tries to convince his once sister-in-law to take his side and plead his case.

Nevertheless, while Lady Anne had been effortlessly dealt with, Elizabeth is a different kind of woman indeed. Having ex-

perienced her life as a queen, Elizabeth is smart and steady, and honed by years of plots and backstabbing.

KING RICHARD
Stay, madam, I must talk a word with you.
QUEEN ELIZABETH
I have no more sons of the royal blood
For thee to slaughter. For my daughters, Richard,
They shall be praying nuns, not weeping queens,
And therefore level not to hit their lives.
KING RICHARD
You have a daughter called Elizabeth,
Virtuous and fair, royal and gracious
QUEEN ELIZABETH
And must she die for this? O, let her live,
And I'll corrupt her manners, stain her beauty,
Slander myself as false to Edward's bed,
Throw over her the veil of infamy.
So she may live unscarred of bleeding slaughter,
I will confess she was not Edward's daughter.
KING RICHARD
Wrong not her birth. She is a royal princess.
QUEEN ELIZABETH
To save her life, I'll say she is not so.
KING RICHARD
Her life is safest only in her birth.
QUEEN ELIZABETH
And only in that safety died her brothers
KING RICHARD
Lo, at their birth good stars were opposite.
QUEEN ELIZABETH
No, to their lives ill friends were contrary.
KING RICHARD
All unavoided is the doom of destiny.
QUEEN ELIZABETH
True, when avoided grace makes destiny.
My babes were destined to a fairer death
If grace had blessed thee with a fairer life.

Off-record impoliteness: condemning implicature alluding to past events

Positive impoliteness: avoid agreeing with other

KING RICHARD
You speak as if that I had slain my cousins.
QUEEN ELIZABETH
Cousins indeed, and by their uncle cozened
Of comfort, kingdom, kindred, freedom, life,
Whose hand soever lanched their tender hearts,
Thy head, all indirectly, gave direction.
No doubt the murderous knife was dull and blunt
Till it was whetted on thy stone-hard heart,
To revel in the entrails of my lambs.
But that still use of grief makes wild grief tame,
My tongue should to thy ears not name my boys
Till that my nails were anchored in thine eyes,
And I in such a desperate bay of death,
Like a poor bark of sails and tackling reft,
Rush all to pieces on thy rocky bosom. (4.4.199–235)

Taboo topic: reference to infanticide

In this sequence, Elizabeth has a great advantage over Richard. Even though Richard is king, he humiliates himself by resorting to pleasantries now that there is a risk to his purpose: his puns are tentative and indirect, he tries to elude proper confession. Elizabeth employs the pronoun *thou*, here treating Richard as a peer, if not as an inferior creature. Richard addresses her with deferential "madam" and ennobling *you*, while Elizabeth calls him by his proper name "Richard". She uses the metaphorical "thy stone-hard heart" and "thy rocky bosom", while he pays compliments to her daughter, who is "virtuous", "fair", "royal", and "gracious". Their conversation represents the shifting balance between the insulter and the insultee, who are using off-record strategies of positive impoliteness to keep their power.[15]

[15] For an extended list of (im)politeness strategies see Brown & Levinson, 1987; Culpeper, 1996.

Elizabeth's blunt reference to infanticide and, worst of all, to an uncle murdering his nephews, is a taboo and an unutterably horrid issue. However, while her expressions and complaints can't even remotely compare to the other queens' dysphemisms, it's Richard himself who introduces the strongest taboo topic of the scene, trying to soften it using politeness.

QUEEN ELIZABETH
Flatter my sorrow with report of it:
Tell me what state, what dignity, what honour,
Canst thou demise to any child of mine?
KING RICHARD
Even all I have – ay, and myself and all –
Will I withal endow a child of thine
So in the Lethe of thy angry soul
Thou drown the sad remembrance of those wrongs
Which thou supposes I have done to thee.
QUEEN ELIZABETH
Be brief, lest that the process of thy kindness
Last longer telling than thy kindness' date.
KING RICHARD
Then know that from my soul I love thy daughter.
QUEEN ELIZABETH
My daughter's mother thinks it with her soul.
KING RICHARD
What do you think?
QUEEN ELIZABETH
That thou dost love my daughter from thy soul;
So from thy soul's love didst thou love her brothers,
And from my heart's love I do thank thee for it.
KING RICHARD
Be not so hasty to confound my meaning:
I mean that with my soul I love thy daughter
And I do intend to make her queen of England.
(4.4.246–264)

Taboo topic: reference to infanticide

Sarcasm/mock politeness

Taboo topic: reference to infanticide

Elizabeth fights Richard through commands ("flatter", "tell me", "be brief") and sarcasm, with direct reference to his crafty "kind-

ness". She also mocks her support when answering his "Then know that from my soul I love thy daughter" with "My daughter's mother thinks it with her soul", only to stab him with evidence of his murderous deeds right after.

Whilst Richard employs his usual courteous strategy with disillusioned Elizabeth, he is also perpetrating a moral crime, asking for his niece's hand. Though incest was historically prohibited by Canon Law, Richard constantly reiterates his intent in the following passages, worsening them with reference to his nephews' homicide as well: "If I did take the kingdom from your sons, / To make amends, I'll give it to your daughter. / If I have killed the issue of your womb, / To quicken your increase I beget / Mine issue of your blood upon your daughter" (4.4.294–298). To which Elizabeth answers with incredulous, rhetorical questions: "What were I best to say? Her father's brother / Would be her lord? Or shall I say her uncle? / Or he that slew her brothers and her uncles? / Under what title shall I woo for thee, / That God, the law, my honour and her love / Can make seem pleasing to her tender years?" (4.4.337–342).

KING RICHARD
Now by my George, my Garter and my crown –
QUEEN ELIZABETH
Profaned, dishonoured and the third usurped.
KING RICHARD
I swear –
QUEEN ELIZABETH
By nothing, for this is no oath:
Thy George, profaned, hath lost his lordly honour;
Thy Garter, blemished, pawned his knightly virtue;
Thy crown, usurped, disgraced his kingly glory.
If something thou wouldst swear to be believed,
Swear then by something that thou hast not wronged.

→ Taboo topic: reference to sacred beings

KING RICHARD
Then by myself –
QUEEN ELIZABETH
Thyself is self-misused.
KING RICHARD
Now by the world –
QUEEN RICHARD
'Tis full of thy foul wrongs.
KING RICHARD
My father's death –
QUEEN ELIZABETH
Thy life hath it dishonoured.
KING RICHARD
Why the, by God.
QUEEN ELIZABETH
God's wrong is most of all. (4.4.366–377)

Negative impoliteness: violate the structure of conversation/ interrupt

→ Taboo topic: reference to sacred beings

Elizabeth proves herself a tough counterpart, interrupting Richard and refuting his oaths, showing her power by anticipating his moves. By admitting his awful conduct, Richard then proceeds to break the ultimate taboo, shamelessly naming Saint George and God.

Richard and Elizabeth find themselves on a battlefield of tense insinuations and vile recriminations. While the main taboos refer to death, murder, incest, and the sacred, the crumbling of Richard's polite strategy to elude or soften them marks for the first time his last attempt at obtaining power.

5. Conclusions

This paper situates itself among other linguistic studies about the use of compliments and insults in a quest for power in Shakespeare Politeness and impoliteness as theorized by Lakoff (1973), Brown and Levinson (1987), Brown and Gilman (1960, 1989), and Culpeper (1996, 2011, 2019) include many schemes of attentively listed strategies that are further to be applied to Shakespearean Histories.

However, the analysis of three scenes of *Richard III* demonstrated how breaking taboos does not always jeopardize the equilibrium of a conversation, yet can actually enhance one's attempts at obtaining triumph.

Richard is a cunning devil, constantly compared to all things unnatural and wrong, penalized by the hatred he himself instigated. He's able to twist and deceive to his liking, and he's the gargantuan dramatic presence in all the analysed scenes.

When dealing with Anne, Richard's being on stage is itself sacrilegious, since he's right in front of his victim's casket. Whereas Anne's outburst of rage in curses referring to filthy creatures should dishearten his purposes, Richard seduces her with compliments and, more than that, with a scandalous taboo reference to her bedchamber.

On the other hand, the confrontation with Margaret of Anjou demonstrates how similar she is to Richard, and how her burning rage can be endured with little effort and unfazed sarcasm.

Elizabeth marks the point of no return in Richard's consolidated strategy. His every mischievous deed, his every oath, and attempted promise are all held against him. Here Richard's dangerous reference to incest, the admission of his crimes, and taking the Lord's name in vain are misused. He appears neither powerful nor penitent.

In these scenes Richard endures curses, anathemas, sarcasm, humiliating nouns and pronouns with unyielding resolve. He speaks taboos and he also commits taboos, seeming unfazed by perturbing references to sex, death, murder, damnation, religion, physical disability, and incest. His schemes endure until his downfall, when breaking those taboos does not prove him to be confident anymore, and someone else starts to parry his blows using the unexpected strength of words.

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Women and legal taboos in the late sixteenth century fictional court: The case of William Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice

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The present essay aims to analyze the trial scene of *The Merchant of Venice*[1] (4.1.163–396) in a pragmalinguistic perspective, in order to demonstrate that in the court of such play behavioural taboos are frequently broken. Special attention will be devoted to Portia's utterances.

The contribution is structured as follows: the first section discusses the coexistence of references, within the play under examination, to the legal systems from 16th-century England and Venice, and how Shakespeare adapted them to suit his dramatic purposes. The second section introduces the methodology, encompassing various theories proposed by Austin (1962), Grice (1975), Searle (1976), Quirk et al. (1985), Brown and Levinson (1987), Culpeper (1996, 2011). The third section delineates Portia's strategy and includes both a qualitative and a quantitative analysis. Lastly, in the conclusion, the atypicality of the staged trial is presented, highlighting its unconventional elements, such as Portia's disregard for legal customs and the unique hierarchy within the courtroom.

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[1] All citations from Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* are drawn from the 2000 (1955) Arden edition by John Russell Brown. The line numbers are provided in parentheses after quotes in the text.

1. The Venetian Law and the Early Modern English Court

Before analysing the chosen excerpt from *The Merchant of Venice*, it is fundamental to clarify some aspects related to early modern English and Venetian law, which are strictly bound to the Shakespearian creation of the fictional courts.

Any reader might question the setting of the play; as the play is set in Venice, shall Venetian law be considered enforced in the court or shall the procedural system of early modern England be the focus? The plot seems to revolve around both legal systems, "that of 16th century England, familiar to his [Shakespeare's] audience, and that of his contemporaneous prosperous and powerful Duchy of Venice, the setting for his action" (Rodner Smith et al., 2002, p. 64). More specifically, it seems plausible that Shakespeare took most of his inspiration from the English trials,[2] which were also regularly published as a form of entertainment[3] (Shoemaker, 2008), while a few elements of Venetian law are present.

In early modern England, treason trials were staged; judges and juries were not always present; witnesses, who often testified before — and not during — the trial, were not consulted if the facts were conceded by the defendant; death sentences and corporal punishments were often the epilogue of the proceedings; and, the defense counsel was not present since it was introduced

[2] In fact, as Raffield (2014, p. 55) affirms, Shakespeare must have been interested in the English law and must have had a "considerable technical knowledge" of it: "Act 4, Scene 1 of *The Merchant of Venice* [seems to draw] upon [specific] aspects of both the Court of Common Pleas and the Court of Chancery".

[3] It should be taken into account that Shoemaker (2008, p. 559) refers to the *Proceedings of the Old Bailey* which, from their first publishing in 1674, became a regular periodical published eight times a year; however, the publishing of trials in form of play or accounts was already very popular (see, among others, Kytö & Walker, 2003; Walker, 2007; Culpeper & Kytö, 2010).

only around the 1730s: until that time, defendants had to speak for themselves (Culpeper & Kytö, 2010, pp. 53–54; Leubsdorf, 2020, pp. 9–11).

It should also be considered that the Elizabethan era was well-known for being a "litigious age" (Raffield, 2014, p. 53) which, by the 1590s, saw the coexistence and rivalry between the principal courts of the common law, the Court of King's Bench and the Court of Common Pleas. In addition, many courts professed the expertise to determine legal action; the most influential, juridically and politically, were the Court of Chancery and the ecclesiastical courts, whose jurisdiction overlapped with the courts of common law. Among the ecclesiastical courts, the Court of High Commission was so pugnacious that the Monarchy decided to sequestrate it (Raffield, 2014, pp. 53–54).

While the legal procedures seem of English origin (Andrews, 1965, p. 19), the Venetian law also seems influential (Carter, 2020). Indeed, Venice's merchant-focused society benefitted its citizens, excluding non-Venetians and *aliens* (like Shylock)[4] from overseas trade, only allowing them to invest in such ventures (González de Lara, 2008, p. 265; Strier, 2013, p. 192).

Despite the fact that Shakespeare was a *connoisseur* of Venetian law and early modern English legal procedures, a fundamental observation in pinpointing the strategy of Portia/Balthazar and the taboos that characterize *The Merchant of Venice*, he staged fictionalized courts that had some *ad hoc* laws, absent in the real proceedings of the time; for instance, the ruler could adjudicate, the court or monarch could order banishment, the

[4] Shylock is a resident of Venice, although without citizen status, as confirmed in 4.1.348–350: "if it be proved against an alien / that by direct or indirect attempts / he seek the life of any citizen [...]". On this, see also Rodner Smith et al. (2022, p. 61).

witnesses – and their depositions – could be absent even when the defendant had not confessed the crime, and in contract disputes, people could be forced to marry, condemned to death or have their properties confiscated (Leubsdorf, 2020, pp. 9–11). In other words, Shakespeare took inspiration from the early modern English court, which he shaped according to his dramatical aims. Indeed, in his fictional legal world, characters reveal more of their personality, helping the onlooker to reflect on the sequence of events staged and finding themselves in the position of a juror, if not a judge, forced to consider both sides.

2. Methodology

In order to pinpoint the pattern of the strategies employed by Portia, the chosen methodology draws on different pragmalinguistic frameworks; the analysis will primarily rely on the influential works of Austin (1962), Grice (1975), Searle (1976), Quirk et al. (1985), Brown and Levinson (1987), Culpeper (1996, 2011), to examine the chosen verbal exchanges.

According to Austin (1962, pp. 98–99), words possess the ability to perform actions, and using his model, it is possible to highlight both the speaker's intention and the (behavioural) response of the listener. He identifies three types of acts: the locutionary act (what is said), the illocutionary act (the intention of the speaker) and the perlocutionary act [the (behavioural) answer of the hearer]. The illocutions, when necessary, will be catalogued according to Searle's model (1976, pp. 10–13):

- representatives, which constitute a description the world;
- directives, aimed to request something or to give an order;
- commissives, used by the speaker to commit to some future action;
- expressives, useful to express the speaker's feelings and opinions;
- declarations, aimed at changing the external situation/world through language.

Furthermore, since "questions have primarily the illocutionary force of inquiries [...] but they are often used as directives conveying requests, offers, invitation and advice" (Quirk et al., 1985, p. 806), they can have implicatures, determined by the sentence meaning itself or by the context; for this reason, they will be analyzed following the model presented in *A Comprehensive Grammar of Contemporary English*[5] (Quirk et al., 1985). Here, questions are divided "into three major classes, according to the type of reply they expect" (p. 806): yes-no questions (in turn divided into: positive yes-no questions, negative yes-no questions, tag questions, tag questions with imperatives and exclamatives, invariant tag questions, declarative questions and yes-no questions with modal auxiliaries), wh-questions (positive wh-questions, negative wh-questions, questions with a pushdown wh-element and questions having more than one wh-element) and alternative questions. There are also minor types of questions, which are particularly relevant for pragmatic analyses, that is exclamatory questions and rhetorical questions (pp. 806–826).

The notion of face is fundamental in interaction, therefore, the categorization of the so-called Face Threatening Acts (FTAs) becomes necessary in order to understand the power dynamics between the characters of the play at study. For this reason, the im/politeness strategies will be identified within the excerpt at issue.

According to Brown and Levinson (1987, pp. 102–211, 129–131) the politeness strategies can be catalogued as follows:

- bald on-record politeness: the Gricean maxims are followed and the FTA is direct and clear;
- positive politeness: the speaker doesn't want to interfere with addressee's freedom;

[5] The authors explicitly refer to contemporary English; however, their classification of questions suits also early modern English.

- negative politeness: the imposition of the FTA is minimized;
- off record politeness: the communicative intention is not clear and more than one interpretation is possible.

Culpeper (1996, pp. 356–357; 2011, p. 213) catalogued the impoliteness strategies specularly:

- bald-on-record impoliteness: the FTA is "direct, clear and unambiguous" (Culpeper, 1996, p. 356);
- positive impoliteness: the hearer's positive face wants are damaged;
- negative impoliteness: the hearer's negative face wants are damaged;
- withhold politeness: "absence of politeness where it would be expected" (p. 357);
- sarcasm or mock politeness: the utterance is falsely polite;
- banter, or mock impoliteness: the utterance is falsely impolite;
- off-record impoliteness: the (FTA) is carried out through implicature, ensuring that one attributable intention clearly prevails over others.

Lastly, it is essential to identify violations of the Gricean maxim of quality, as judges are not permitted to engage in them. This category encompasses the overarching supermaxim, as articulated by Grice (1975): "Try to make your contribution one that it is true" (p. 46). Other maxims include the maxim of quantity (give the apt quantity of information), relation (be truthful and provide only information which is supported by evidence) and manner (be clear, brief and orderly and avoid obscurity and ambiguity).

The selected excerpt from *The Merchant of Venice* (4.1.163–396) will undergo a comprehensive analysis, both quantitatively and qualitatively, employing the methodology outlined above.

3. "Of a strange nature is the suit you follow": The Strategy of Portia

In Act 4, Scene 1 of *The Merchant of Venice*, Portia enters the court disguised as Balthazar, a male judge. The reasons for such a choice are strategical: although she is aware that women are not allowed to serve as judges or hold positions of authority in formal legal proceedings,[6] she acts to manipulate the trial, aiming to help Antonio.

The very necessity to assume the guise of a male judge in order to gain entry to the court underscores the legal prohibition against her presence, classifying it as a *societal taboo* of early modern England. Furthermore, she completely ignores the legal regulations on trials and performs behavioural taboos using language. Indeed, she tends not to behave like a learned judge, not respecting the customs and the standard phase order of early modern trial proceedings:

1. reading of the indictment;
2. pleading of guilt/non-guilt;
3. swearing in of witnesses;
4. witness accounts;
5. cross-examination;
6. summing-up;
7. verdict.

The first issue to receive attention in the present analysis is the total volume of talk for each participant; the excerpt object of

[6] It is only with the passing of the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act of 1919 that women gained such rights:

A person shall not be disqualified by sex or marriage from the exercise of any public function, or from being appointed to or holding any civil or judicial office or post, or from entering or assuming or carrying on any civil profession or vocation, or for admission to any incorporated society (whether incorporated by Royal Charter or otherwise), and a person shall not be exempted by sex or marriage from the liability to serve as a juror.

study consists of 83 turns or conversational contributions[7] and a total amount of 1858 tokens,[8] divided as follows:

Character	Turns	Tokens	Tokens/Turn
Portia	34	864	25,41
Shylock	24	360	15
Bassanio	4	140	35
Antonio	5	251	50,2[9]
Graziano	9	151	16,77
Duke	6	76	12,66
Nerissa	1	16	16

Table 1: Distribution of talk across the characters of the selected excerpt of *The Merchant of Venice* (4.1.163–396)

A major area of interest within the field of jurisprudence is constituted by questions since they have a key role in trials: as commonly known, questions are asked by the person who leads the discourse, who in some cases may be considered the interviewer. Thus, it is interesting to observe that the chosen excerpt includes 21 questions: 12 asked by Portia, 6 by Shylock and 2 by the Duke. Consid-

[7] Turn taking can be defined as a "basic form of organization for conversation in this sense of basic, that it would be invariant to parties such that whatever variations the parties brought to bear in the conversation would be accommodated without change in the system, and that it could be selectively and locally affected by such social aspects of context" (Sacks et al., 1978, p. 10). For some possibilities of categorization of turn taking see Sacks et al. (1978, pp. 15–40). About turn taking, see also Wilson et al. (1984), Schegloff (2000), Sacks (2004), Drew (2012) and Hayashi (2012).

[8] The tokens were counted using #LancsBox X (the names of the characters as well as the stage directions were excluded from the count).

[9] As highlighted by Culpeper and Kytö (2010, p. 326), a major length of conversational turns may be bound to a greater emotional involvement.

ering the number of turns, tokens and questions, Portia and Shylock appear as the key characters of the trial scene. Thus, while the quantitative analysis will include the turns of Portia, independently from whom they are addressed to, the qualitative analysis will focus on the interaction between Portia and Shylock; the turns of the other characters will be considered only if meaningful.

3.1 Quantitative Data

In the following table the data about the chosen excerpt will be displayed. The excerpt is considered in its entirety as well as divided in two parts: the first including the lines concerning the fictitious sentence, and the second including the ones concerning the real sentence, which was pronounced in two different moments.

Linguistic categorization	**Part 1 (163-299)**	**Part 2 (300-396)**	**Total (163-396)**
Classification of illocutionary speech acts[10]			
Representatives	25	8	33
Declaratives	7	8	15
Directives	10	11	21
Commissives	0	0	0
Expressives	0	0	0

[10] In the count, full stops, semicolons and colons were considered as fundamental for the division of the speech acts. However, three peculiar cases are present within the selected excerpt; the sentences at issue (4.1.173–174, 256 and 317–318) can be divided in two parts that need to be differently categorized: the sentence beginning at line 173 can be divided in a representative and a declarative; the first part of line 256 can be categorized as a representative, the second one as a rhetorical question; and, the sentence straddling between line 317 and 318 can be divided into a directive and a declarative. In all of the above-mentioned cases, the division is marked by a punctuation mark (i.e., a comma). It should also be noticed that the comical remark of line 284 was excluded from the count.

Classification of questions			
Yes/no questions	5 (4 positive yes/no questions, 1 negative yes/no question)	0	5
Wh- questions	1	1	2
Rhetorical questions	1	4	4[11]
Tag questions	1	0	1
Classification according to the im/politeness theory[12]			
Bald on record [ON-REC]	8	9	17
Off record [OFF-REC]	2	2	4
Positive politeness [PP]	6	0	6
Negative politeness [NP]	4	0	4
Positive impoliteness [PI]	1	3	4
Negative impoliteness [NI]	0	2	2
Mock politeness [MP]	0	2	2

Table 2: Display of the characteristics of Portia's speech within the selected excerpt (*The Merchant of Venice*, 4.1.163–396)

[11] The rhetorical questions, which in this essay are dedicated a specific section, can be categorized as follows: 3 positive wh-questions (4.1.256, 331, 388) and 1 positive yes/no question (4.1.388).

[12] Each turn was categorized according to the im/politeness model discussed in paragraph 2. When a turn included more than an im/politeness strategy, all of them were included in the count.

3.2 Qualitative Analysis

The beginning of the chosen excerpt is fundamental in the present pragmatic analysis; Portia, after having confirmed she comes from Bellario, pretends not to know who the people in front of her are:

PORTIA	
I am informed throughly of the cause, –	[Representative]
Which is the merchant here? and which the Jew?	
DUKE	
Antonio and old Shylock, both stand forth.	[Positive wh- question] [PI][13]
[Antonio and Shylock stand forth]	
PORTIA	
Is your name Shylock?	[Positive yes/no question]
SHYLOCK	
Shylock is my name. (4.1.170-173)	

As it can be observed, firstly, Portia uses a positive wh-question and then a positive yes-no question; usually, this type of questions is neutral since there are no expectations concerning the answer (Quirk et al. 1985, p. 808). However, in this case, the onlooker already knows from the previous parts of the play what the answer will be. Nevertheless, the question remains particularly relevant if analyzed in pragmatical terms; in fact, asking the Duke about the identity of the people in their presence and thus ignoring them, results in a stating of the Duke's power.

[13] Portia often fails to acknowledge the presence of some people who are in front of her. For this reason, these strategies were classified as positive impoliteness; however, they are not relevant because they are common within trials and they simply make explicit a power dynamic, which is obvious because of the institutional roles within the trial.

In the following lines, Portia adopted what can be considered a behavioural taboo realized through the use of language; while such types of taboo did exist in the courts of the 17th century, it is definitely inoperative in the Shakespearean one:

PORTIA	
Of a strange nature is the suit you follow,	[Representative] [PP]
Yet in such rule that the Venetian law	
Cannot impugn you as you do proceed.	[Declarative]
You stand within his danger, do you not?	[Tag question]
ANTONIO	
Ay, so he says.	
PORTIA	
Do you confess the bond?	[Positive yes/no question]
ANTONIO	
I do.	
PORTIA	
Then must the Jew be merciful.	[Directive] [ON-R]
SHYLOCK	
On what compulsion must I? tell me that.	

(4.1.173–181; my emphasis)

Line 173 includes a value statement ("*Of a strange nature* is the suit you follow"; my emphasis) that constitutes both an example of a representative illocutionary act and the manifestation of the inoperativity of a taboo: in fact, under no circumstances can a judge express such an assessment before pronouncing the sentence; furthermore, the lines 174–175 ("Yet in such rule that the Venetian law, Cannot impugn you as you do proceed") can be considered a sentence itself, that is a declarative, which has the aim of deceiving Shylock, leading him to believe that Balthazar agrees that the law meets his will [PP]. Such a practice highlights the inoperativity of taboos in the trial scene of *The Merchant of Venice*; indeed, not only is the standard structure of early modern trials not respected but the

judge is also being insincere (violation of the quality maxim; Grice, 1975).

After Antonio has confessed the bond, Portia performs an on-record FTA, trying to limit Shylock's will and hoping to lean on his desire to be accepted by society: "Then must the Jew be merciful" (4.1.180). However, Shylock's answer (perlocutionary act) rejects this possibility: his denial is realized through a wh-question followed by a request, which is clearly on record because of the presence of a non-mitigated imperative form. The above-mentioned answer is followed by the famous speech, given by Portia, known as "the quality of mercy":

PORTIA	
The quality of mercy is not strained.	[Representative] [OFF-R]
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven	[Representative]
Upon the place beneath: it is twice blest,	[Representative]
It blesseth him that gives, and him that takes.	[Representative]
'Tis mightiest in the mightiest, it becomes	[Representative]
The throned monarch better than his crown.	[Representative]
His sceptre shows the force of temporal power,	[Representative]
The attribute to awe and majesty,	
Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings:	
But mercy is above this sceptred sway.	[Representative]
It is enthroned in the hearts of kings;	[Representative]
It is an attribute to God himself;	[Representative]
And earthly power doth then show likest God's	[Representative]
When mercy seasons justice: therefore, Jew,	
Though justice be thy plea, consider this,	[Directive] [ON-REC]
That in the course of justice none of us	[Representative] [PP]
Should see salvation: we do pray for mercy,	[Representative]
And that same prayer, doth teach us all to render	
The deeds of mercy. I have spoke thus much	
To mitigate the justice of thy plea,	[Representative] [PP]
Which if thou follow, this strict court of Venice	
Must needs give sentence 'gainst the merchant there.	
(4.1.180–201)	

Portia's speech might be interpreted as a long series of representative illocutionary acts, interrupted by a directive; however, if examined in depth and considered within the im/politeness theory, it can also be considered as a series of off-record directives,[14] constituting a wide and extremely indirect FTA. This hypothesis is deemed plausible not only due to the persuasive nature of the passage's meaning but also because of the inclusion of the vocative "Jew" in line 193. Indeed, the vocative serves as a distinct boundary between the segments of the speech: the first part, characterized by Portia's ambiguous intention, and the second part, in which she explicitly states her aim to temper the severity of Shylock's plea. This vocative acts as a pivotal moment, demarcating the transition from uncertainty to a clear declaration of purpose in Portia's speech. In other words, the FTA in the monologue is stated in two different ways: while in the first part it is performed off-record, in the second Portia explicitly asks Shylock to reconsider the situation ⌈ON-REC⌉ but, at the same time, she claims a common point of view ⌈PP⌉, mitigating her directive; moreover, in lines 194–195, Portia uses the identity markers "we" and "us" in order to claim in group membership. What should be noticed is that the conclusion of Portia's speech indicates, once more, the inoperativity of taboos within the Shakespearean court: in fact, she – a judge – is lying when restating that the law meets Shylock's will and if he wishes to proceed, the sentence will be favorable (request

[14] It should be noticed that for the quantitative analysis the passage at issue was categorized as follows: 14 representatives and 1 directive. The peculiar categorization is due to the extreme off-recordness of the passage at issue that wouldn't allow an objective categorization of the illocutionary acts as directives. Further criteria concerning the division of the sentences have been clarified in note 10.

i.e., directive; ⌈PP⌉). Furthermore, judges were not allowed to affirm that a sentence would be favourable to a certain person.[15]

Afterwards, Shylocks confirms his will; however, Portia asks a negative yes/no question showing her bewilderment:

PORTIA
Is he not able to discharge the money? ⌈Negative yes/no question⌉
BASSANIO
Yes, here I tender it for him in the court,
Yea, twice the sum, – if that will not suffice,
I will be bound to pay it ten times o'er
On forfeit of my hands, my head, my heart,
–If this will not suffice, it must appear
That malice bears down truth. And, I beseech you,
Wrest once the law to your authority, –
To do a great right, do a little wrong, –
And curb this cruel devil of his will.
(4.1.204–213)

Portia already knows that the merchant is "able to discharge the money" (4.1.204), as Bassanio confirms.

The presence of an FTA in his speech should be highlighted, as it is closely linked to Portia's subsequent neglect of the law (inoperativity of taboo). Specifically, the Venetian gentleman requests that she defy the law, hoping in a positive response driven by her desire for societal acclaim. However, Portia – who does not reprimand her interactant – refuses his request through an on-record perlocutionary act, strongly at odds with the real fi-

[15] Such a prohibition is evident when observing the legal customs in the section of *Corpus of English Dialogues* (Culpeper & Kytö, 2005) dedicated to trials.

nal sentence and thus indicating again that most taboos are inoperative in the Shakespearean court:

PORTIA
It must not be, there is no power in Venice [Representative] [ON-REC]
Can alter a decree established:
'Twill be recorded for a precedent,
And many an error by the same example [Representative]
Will rush into the state, – It cannot be. [Representative]
(4.1.214–218)

After the "wise young judge" (4.1.220) is praised by Shylock, she asks to see the bond through a directive ("I pray you, let me look upon the bond" [NP]; 4.1.221) and Shylock, again praising the "most reverend doctor" (4.2.222), accepts (perlocutionary act). Portia then affirms:

PORTIA
Shylock, there's thrice thy money offer'd thee. [Representative] [NP]
(4.1.223)

The vocative "Shylock" is clearly a request for a high level of attention: quantifying Bassanio's offer, Portia is implicitly asking him to forgive Antonio and to accept the enormous amount of money. In other words, she performs an FTA [NP], showing her refusal of the law and of the customs of early modern trials. Due to Shylock's refusal, Portia decides to award the pound of human flesh to Shylock (declarative) [PP], but she subsequently performs the same FTA on-record, using three imperative forms "[…] be merciful, [Directive] / Take thrice thy money [Directive], bid me tear the bond [Directive] [ON-REC]" (4.1.229–230). Although in the above-mentioned sentence there is no explicit redressive action, the term "merciful" is fundamental for Portia's strategy: indeed, she tries to persuade her interlocutor, seeking to leverage on his morals and

instilling in him the idea that he has the power (as confirmed by the form "bid me"). However, Shylock shows no compassion and Portia pronounces the sentence, consisting of a representative, two directives and a declarative ("Why then thus it is, – / You must prepare your bosom for his knife. [ON-REC] / […] For the intent and purpose of the law / Hath full relation to the penalty, Which here appeareth due upon the bond. / […] [to Antonio] Therefore lay bare your bosom." [ON-REC] 4.1.243–248), punctuated by Shylock's praises towards her. In the following exchange, Portia appears to lead the situation towards a tragical end:

PORTIA	
It is so, – are there balance here to weigh The flesh?	[Representative] [Positive yes/no question]
SHYLOCK	
I have them ready.	
PORTIA	
Have by some surgeon, Shylock, on your charge, To stop his wounds, lest he do bleed to death.	[Directive] [ON-REC]
SHYLOCK	
Is it so nominated in the bond?	
PORTIA	
It is not so express'd, but what of that? 'Twere good you do so much for charity.	[Positive yes/no question] [Representative] [Rhetorical question] [OFF-REC]
SHYLOCK	
I cannot find it, 'tis not in the bond.	[Representative] [NP]
PORTIA	
You, merchant, have you anything to say? (4.1.251–259)	[Positive yes/no question] [NP]

Firstly, Portia uses a yes/no question in order to ask about the presence of a "balance" (4.1.251). Afterwards, she uses an imperative (i.e., directive) threatening Shylock's negative face on-record: she tries to explicitly impose him to pay a surgeon to

save the merchant's life, instilling the belief that something detrimental will occur to the merchant. Shylock's perlocutionary act is realized through a positive yes/no question concerning the presence of the detail in the bond, showing his lack of moral. Portia denies that the request is part of the bond, asks a rhetorical question (4.1.259) and then tries to leverage again on his moral and on his will of being accepted by society. Shylock's perlocutionary act (denial) clearly shows that he has no morals and no interest in being accepted by society. Then, Portia addresses a yes/no question to Antonio, who gives a long-winded answer (18 lines).[16] After some comical remarks (aside) by Portia (4.1.284–285) and Nerissa (4.1.289–290), and a critique to Christians by the Jewish money-lender, Shylock asks aloud and on-record for the sentence to be pronounced; Portia immediately pronounces it (declarative) and is praised once again by Shylock:

We trifle time, I pray thee pursue sentence.
PORTIA
A pound of that same merchant's flesh is thine, [Declarative] [PP]
The court awards it, and the law doth give it.
SHYLOCK
Most rightful judge! (4.1.294–297) [Declarative]

The following exchange mirrors the previous one but it is realized through the usage of different linguistic means:

PORTIA
And you must cut this flesh from off his breast. [Directive] [ON-REC]
The law allows it, and the court awards it.

[16] Emotional involvement is apparent. About emotional involvement see Culpeper and Kytö (2010, p. 326).

SHYLOCK
Most learned judge! a sentence, come, [Declarative]
Prepare (4.1.298–300).

In fact, Portia uses a directive [ON-REC] followed by a declarative and Shylock, after praising once again the "[m]ost learned judge" (4.1.300), performs again an on-record FTA, asking Antonio to come closer through a directive. However, Portia interferes with the events, showing her real aim and negotiating the sentence:

PORTIA
Tarry a little. There is something else, – [Directive] [ON-REC]
This bond doth give thee here no jot of blood. [Representative] [OFF-REC]
The words expressly are "a pound of flesh": [Representative] [OFF-REC]
Take then thy bond, take thou thy pound of flesh. [Representative]
But in the cutting it, if thou dost shed [Directive] [Directive] [ON-REC]
One drop of Christian blood, thy lands and goods [Declarative] [NI]
Are (by the laws of Venice) confiscate
Unto the state of Venice. (4.1.301–308)

As it can be observed in the above reported lines, Portia abruptly interrupts Shylock (on-record directive) and, through a series of three representatives, begins to put her plan into action, revealing she has violated the maxim of quality during the entire trial and that she has never agreed with the Jewish money-lender. The above-mentioned representatives are followed by 2 impolite directives [ON-REC] and by a declarative reporting the economic repercussions that the cutting of flesh may have. Particularly meaningful is the repetition of the second person pronoun "thou" and of its related possessive adjective "thy"; in fact, it shows that the use of in-group markers previously discussed (4.1.194–195) was insincere and, furthermore, they emphasize the isolation of the Jewish money lender, his responsibility and his lack of supporters.

Shylock, then, doesn't begin the procedure (perlocutionary act) and asks if that is the law, causing Portia to impolitely state what follows:

PORTIA	
Thyself shalt see the act:	⌈Directive⌉ ⌈ON-REC⌉
For, as thou urgest justice, be assur'd	⌈Representative⌉
Thou shalt have justice more than thou desir'st.	
(4.1.310–312)	

Subsequently, Shylock accepts the previous offer and asks the payment of thrice the money (two on record directives): "I take this offer, then, – pay the bond thrice, / And let the Christian go" (4.1.314–315). The second directive is fundamental because it implies a sort of compassion or morality that the Jew hadn't shown before and thus, can be considered fictitious. Bassanio accepts to give him thrice the sum (perlocutionary act); however, Portia gradually introduces the first part of the real sentence:[17]

PORTIA	
Soft!	⌈Declarative⌉ ⌈PI⌉
The Jew shall have all justice, – soft, no haste!	⌈Directive⌉
He shall have nothing but the penalty. (4.1.316–318)	⌈Declarative⌉ ⌈ON-REC⌉

Then she asks Shylock to prepare, informing him of the conditions through a wide declarative, characterized by negative impoliteness; indeed, Portia states that something detrimental to Shylock may occur:

PORTIA	
Therefore, prepare thee to cut off the flesh, —	⌈Directive⌉ ⌈ON-REC⌉
Shed thou no blood, nor cut thou less nor more	⌈Directive⌉
But just a pound of flesh: if thou tak'st more	⌈Declarative⌉ ⌈NI⌉

[17] As anticipated, during a trial only a sentence can be pronounced; thus, the previous (fake) sentences (4.1.295–296 and 298–299) should be considered a breaking of a taboo; however, the taboo is inoperative since there are no consequences for the behaviour of Portia/Balthazar.

Or less than a just pound, be it but so much
As makes it light or heavy in the substance
Or the division of the twentieth part
Of one poor scruple — nay, if the scale do turn
But in the estimation of a hair,
Thou diest, and all thy goods are confiscate.
(4.1.320–329)

Later, Portia asks a rhetorical question, which may be considered an example of mock politeness since Portia is disguised and no-one seems to suspect it; the above-mentioned question is followed by an order to Shylock (directive), which can be considered part of the same FTA, also realized through mock politeness:

PORTIA	
Why doth the Jew pause? Take thy forfeiture.	[Positive wh- question]
(4.1.331)	[Directive] [PI] [MP]

Shylock's perlocutionary act consists in a refusal, expressed through the request to obtain his "principal" and to leave (directive). Despite Bassanio wanting to give the requested amount of money in order to save his friend's life, Portia's decision remarkably differs:[18]

PORTIA	
He hath refus'd it in the open court,	[Representative] [PI]
He shall have merely justice and his bond	[Declarative]
(4.1.334–335).	

[18] Here it will not be discussed if justice has been obtained. However, it must be underlined that Portia's rulings are absurd and Shylock has not been properly treated (Leubsdorf, 2020, p. 30); in fact, he lost the money he lent and he is forced to convert to Christianity: in other words, his individual freedoms are infringed.

Shylock, clearly startled, complains about the decision ("Shall I not have barely my principal?"; 4.1.338). However, Portia restates again her decision, refusing Shylock's objection: "Thou shalt have nothing but the forfeiture / To be so taken at thy peril, Jew" [Declarative] [ON-REC] (4.1.339–340). Afterwards, the Jewish money lender again affirms his will to leave but he is stopped by Portia:

PORTIA	
Tarry, Jew,	[Directive] [ON-REC]
The law hath yet another hold on you.	[Representative] [OFF-REC]
It is enacted in the laws of Venice,	[Representative]
If it be proved against an alien,	
That by direct or indirect attempts	
He seek the life of any citizen,	
The party 'gainst the which he doth contrive	
Shall seize one half his goods, the other half	
Comes to the privy coffer of the state,	
And the offender's life lies in the mercy	
Of the Duke only, 'gainst all other voice.	
In which predicament I say thou stand'st,	
For it appears by manifest proceeding,	[Declarative] [ON-REC]
That indirectly, and directly too,	
Thou hast contrived against the very life	
Of the defendant: and thou hast incurr'd	
The danger formerly by me rehears'd.	
Down, therefore, and beg mercy of the duke.	[Directive]
(4.1.343–359)	

Portia, uttering in the following order 1 directive, 2 representatives, 1 declarative and 1 directive, pronounces the second part of the real sentence, demonstrating the operativity of the same taboo.

Subsequently, she acts as if she were superior to the Duke. In fact, the Duke affirms that "for half thy [Shylock's] wealth, it is Antonio's, / The other half comes to the general state, / Which humbleness may drive unto a fine" (4.1.366–368) but Portia im-

mediately underlines that Antonio must receive his part of Shylock's wealth (declarative without an explicit verb). Since Shylock complains about the injustice, Portia asks Antonio a positive wh-question, leading him to change the sentence again (breaking a taboo) upon the agreement of the Duke and all the court (perlocutionary act).

PORTIA
Ay, for the state, not for Antonio. [Declarative]
SHYLOCK
Nay, take my life and all, pardon not that, –
You take my house when you do take the prop
That doth sustain my house: you take my life
When you do take the means whereby I live.
PORTIA
What mercy can you render him, Antonio? [Positive wh- question]
GRATIANO
A halter gratis, nothing else for Godsake!
ANTONIO
So please my lord the duke, and all the court,
To quit the fine for one half of his goods,
I am content: so he will let me have
The other half in use, to render it
Upon his death unto the gentleman
That lately stole his daughter.
Two things provided more, that for this favour
He presently become a Christian:
The other, that he do record a gift
(Here in the court) of all he dies possess'd
Unto his son Lorenzo and his daughter.
(4.1.367–386)

In the subsequent exchange, Portia uses again mock politeness:

PORTIA
Art thou contented, Jew? What dost thou say? [Rhetorical question] [Positive wh- question] [MP]
SHYLOCK
I am content. (4.1.389–390)

In fact, she asks a rhetorical question to Shylock followed by a wh-question that the Jew must answer in a positive way, unless the Duke will "recant the pardon" he pronounced.

In the final exchange, Portia orders Nerissa to "draw a deed of gift" [Directive] [ON-REC] (4.1.391), while Shylock asks for the permission to leave and sign the deed of gift later. After the Duke's approval, the Jewish money lender leaves the court.

PORTIA
[to Nerissa] Clerk, draw a deed of gift. [Directive] [ON-REC]
SHYLOCK
I pray you give me leave to go from hence,
I am not well, send the deed after me,
And I will sign it.
DUKE
Get thee gone, but do it.
[…]
Exit [Shylock] (4.1.391–397)

4. Conclusion

The present essay demonstrates that the trial scene of *The Merchant of Venice* (4.1.163–396) shows an atypical trial, a "highly fictionalized account" (Raffield, 2014, p. 71) where Portia ignores most legal customs by entering the court and acting as a judge – disguised as Balthazar –, consequently breaking societal taboos. Indeed, Portia states that the suit followed by Shylock is "of a strange nature" (4.1.173), thus giving a value judgement that should not be provided until the sentence. Furthermore, in the same lines (4.1.173–175), the first fictitious ruling is pronounced in favour of Shylock. Then, Portia continues to break three main taboos, which are inoperative in the Shakespearean fictional court: lying (affirming that the law meets Shylock's

will), begging Shylock for mercy,[19] and restating the fake sentence (4.1.227–230, 295–296, 298–299).

From the collected data, it is clear that Portia's discourse is characterized by a great number of representatives, which should have the aim of describing the world. However, the world described by Portia is evidently a feasible but unreal world: she continuously flouts the maxim of quality, causing her utterances to not represent reality but constituting an expression of her strategy, which – as already stated – is based on the breaking of taboos.

The effective and unconventional sentence, which will be later further negotiated by Antonio, is to be found in the concluding part of the excerpt at issue, (re)stated in three different moments (4.1.305–309, 321–328, 350–359) and able to surprise the onlooker[20] because it is based on a quibble. Furthermore, in the lines before the final restating of the sentence (4.1.328), Portia takes the privilege to make fun of Shylock who was hesitant due to the dangers disclosed by Portia, behaviour which would equate to breaking a taboo in a real-life trial; however, the taboo is inoperative for fictional reasons.

The atypical hierarchy, which is shown within the chosen excerpt, becomes evident in its final part. In fact, not only does Portia contradict the Duke, affirming that what he says is valid for the state but not for Antonio (4.1.369), but also Antonio, who – in the hierarchical pyramid of the court – is below the disguised Portia and the Duke, takes the liberty to negotiate the sentence (4.1.376–386) and surprisingly his statements are considered valid by the other characters. In the end, Portia again goes against the legal customs, making fun of the condemned one more time.

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[19] In the first part of the speech, she indirectly begs for mercy; but, in its second part, the request becomes clear. Furthermore, the request is restated between lines 229 and 230.

[20] In fact, "Portia unveils a previously unmentioned and dubiously applicable statute (indeed, two statues [ll. 305–314, 346–362])" (Leubsdorf, 2020, p. 20).

In conclusion, Portia's strategy is the only possible answer to the "dramatic conflict over the enforceability of Antonio's bond [that] represents the theme of immutable law colliding with a flexible and humane, alternative model" (Raffield, 2014, p. 60), that is embodied by Portia and by her attempt to guarantee only the common physical good, instead of achieving real justice. Portia, after being admired as an ideal Renaissance lady for the entire duration of the play (Newman, 1987, p. 29), becomes an "unruly woman [...] who steps outside her role and functions as subservient, a woman who [has the courage to dress] like a man, who embarks upon behaviour ill-suited to her 'weaker' intellect, a woman who argues the law" (Newman, 1987, p. 28). Her strategy, which would not be allowed in a real life early modern trial, demonstrates the inoperativity of taboos in the Shakespearean court. In other words, inoperative behavioural taboos are realized through the performative usage of language, highlighted by the present pragmatic analysis. Her strategy is surely "far from simply exemplifying the Elizabethan sex/gender system of exchange, [in fact,] the *Merchant* short-circuits the exchange, mocking its authorized social structure and hierarchical gender relations" (p. 27). *Videlicet*, Portia leads the vicissitude to its end, without questioning the fairness of the sentence but by being the symbol of a woman capable of playing every role, including the ones apt only for men.

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Strategies of silence in All's Well That Ends Well *and* Measure for Measure

Aoife Beville*

1. Introduction

1.1 Silence and Taboo

Taboo – among its many meanings – can be understood as the linguistic and cultural negotiation of selective, relative silence. Thus, as demonstrated by Krajewski and Schröder, the concepts of silence and taboo are intrinsically linked (2008). This contribution aims to examine the pragmatic strategies used to establish, maintain and strategically break interpersonal codes of silence within two Shakespearian plays, i.e., *All's Well That Ends Well* (henceforth *AW*) and *Measure for Measure* (henceforth *MM*). The silencing of others or the promise to remain silent should be viewed as strategic communicative choices. Both comedies rely on silence and secrecy to fuel their narrative structures.

Studies on the nature of taboo have focussed on the psychological power and emotive force of words linked to fear, power, death, sex, and other 'unpleasant' topics (Allan & Burridge, 2006; Krajewski & Schröder, 2008). Culpeper examines the pragmatic function of taboo language within the realm of linguistic impoliteness (2018). Recent studies on silence have revealed its communicative function within discourse (Ephratt, 2012, 2014; Ja-

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worski, 1992, 1997; Kurzon, 2011; Stucky, 1994). Remarkably, the foundational studies in pragmatics (Austin, 1962; Grice, 1957, 1969, 1989; Searle, 1975) pay no, or negligible, attention to silence – with the exception of Levinson's considerations concerning silence within Conversation Analysis (1983, pp. 299–345).

Speech Act Theory, as first proposed by Austin (1962) presents the concept of locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts performed by the speaker. The locutionary act is the act of uttering a locution. The illocutionary act is the act of performing the function of the utterance (asking a question, describing, commanding, etc). The perlocutionary act refers to the effects produced through the utterance (persuasion, annoyance, etc). Searle (1969, 1975) expanded on the classification of speech acts, codifying the felicity conditions that Austin had referenced and introducing notions such as the "illocutionary force indicating device" (IFID). Searle briefly summarises the "five general categories of illocutionary acts" as follows:

> we tell people how things are (Assertives [Representatives]), we try to get them to do things (Directives), we commit ourselves to doing things (Commissives), we express our feelings and attitudes (Expressives), and we bring about changes in the world through our utterances (Declarations). (1979, p. viii)

Searle's description of speech acts and his classification of the five major classes of act have become the reference point for all further expansions, reductions and revisitations of the theory, such as Leech's addition of "rogatives" (questioning, inquiring) (1983, p. 206). In Gricean terms, silence may be considered, as a form of "opting out" of the Cooperative Principle[1] (CP), thus

[1] Grice's Cooperative Principle is as follows: "Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accept-

choosing to be uncooperative. However, Ephratt (2012) convincingly argues for a more balanced view: envisioning silence both as a possible means of being uncooperative (opting out of the CP) and as a way of creating context-dependent implicatures through conversationnal cooperation (2012). Stucky (1994), in his analysis of pauses in dramatic performance, remarks that:

> silence in dramatic performance is a turn which may be shown to be communicatively relevant, specifically that it may come to have illocutionary force. [...] A pause in dramatic literature (a locution that happens to be silent) can have illocutionary force by virtue of its sequential placement. One can trace the illocutionary force of such an object by examination of the surrounding talk. (pp. 172–174)

Conversation Analysis is the ethnomethodological branch of linguistic inquiry preoccupied with the rules of exchange that govern conversation (turn-taking, transitions, etc.). While CA is a separate field from pragmatics, it has long been included as a part of the pragmatic framework.[2] CA's concept of Attributable Silence (AS), the notion that certain silences can be considered as attributable to a particular speaker – as a sort of 'missed turn' – is particularly relevant for the present essay:

> The attributability of the silence reflects an orientation to the next-speaker-selection component of the turn-taking machin-

ed purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged" (Grice, 1989, p. 26). The maxims of conversation, which emerge from the CP are those of quantity (be as informative as required), quality (be truthful), relation (be relevant) and manner (be clear, brief and orderly) (pp. 26–27).

[2] Levinson's *Pragmatics* (1983) presents a chapter entitled 'Conversational Structure' which serves as a succinct introduction to Conversation Analysis and its integration into the wider pragmatic framework (pp. 284–370).

> ery that can have generated a 'some speaker's turn' at a given point in the course of the conversation, so that a silence at that point may be attributable to that 'speaker'. (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973, p. 294; see also Levinson, 1983)

Recent studies have focussed on the types of meanings made through silence. Here, my aim is to investigate the pragmatic nature of the negotiation of such meaningful silences by examining accords of silence, imposition of silence and instances of breaking such silences. This essay will, therefore, examine the negotiation of silence from the complementary pragmatic perspectives of the CP (Ephratt, 2012; Grice, 1989), Searle's taxonomy of speech acts (Searle, 1975) and Attributable Silence (AS) (Levinson, 1983; Sacks et al., 1974; Schegloff & Sacks, 1973).

1.2 Silence in Measure for Measure *and* All's Well That Ends Well

Measure for Measure (*MM*) and *All's Well That Ends Well* (*AW*) have long been considered "problem plays". This categorisation was reimagined by Melchiori who describes both comedies as "dialectical dramas" (Melchiori, 2010).[3] Such a distinction un-

[3] The classification by Melchiori expands on the critical category of "problem plays" which first emerged with Boas in the late 1880s and has seen a remarkable longevity see (Barker, 2005; Boas, 1910; Lawrence, 1969; Rhodes, 2000; Tillyard, 1950; Toole, 1996), for a fuller discussion of the grouping (Beville, 2022, pp. 32–35). Melchiori's recategorization endeavours to investigate the dialectical nature of the plays asserting that: "la loro vitalità è invece tutta nel dibattito interno al dramma, indipendentemente dagli esiti, sta in un continuo confronto dialettico che acquista valore assoluto di ricerca di una verità che, proprio per essere vera, non può essere unica e univocal" [their vitality is all in the internal debate in the drama, independent of the outcome, it lies in a continuous dialectical debate which acquires the absolute value of a quest for the truth, a truth which, in order to be true, cannot be unique and univocal" (Melchiori, 2010, p. 406 – trans-

derlines the dialectical dimension of both plays; their value and vitality come from the debate inherent to the drama. Furthermore, both comedies share some interesting commonalities in terms of structure and composition. *MM* is dated to 1603–1604 and it is widely accepted that the version present in the 1623 *First Folio* includes significant revisions made by Middleton (Braunmuller & Watson, 2020; Taylor & Egan, 2017). Similarly, *AW* is commonly dated to *circa* 1605 and also shows evidence of Middleton's contribution (Taylor & Egan, 2017, pp. 278–384; Taylor & Loughnane, 2017, pp. 557–559).

In *MM*, Duke Vincentio of Vienna pretends to leave the city, ostensibly entrusting viceregency to the puritanical Angelo who is eager to purge the city of its licentious vices. Disguised as a friar, the Duke observes the consequences of his absence. Angelo has zealously begun to enforce the death penalty for fornication, causing the arrest and imprisonment of the young Claudio and his pregnant betrothed, Juliet. Claudio's morally ambiguous and quick-witted friend, Lucio, hurries to the convent to seek help from Isabella, Claudio's sister, before she takes her vows to enter the Clarissan order of nuns. He implores her to intercede on her brother's behalf. Isabella's supplications have a surprising effect on Angelo; he becomes infatuated with her, vowing to release her brother only if she agrees to his sexual advances. The Duke-as-Friar learns of Isabella's plight and devises a plan. They persuade Angelo's jilted ex-betrothed, Mariana, to take Isabella's place, thus consummating their sworn marriage. In spite of the successful bed-trick, Angelo orders Claudio's swift execution. The Duke procures a substitute head

lation my own). The dialectical nature of the plays is intended here both in the classical sense of an exchange of contrasting opinions without the necessity of a final resolution and as a linguistic notion of discursivity.

in order to fake Claudio's execution, sheds his friar's habit and stages a final trial scene.

The plot of *AW* revolves around Helen, an orphaned physician's daughter in the noble French household of Roussillon. She is secretly in love with the young Bertram, heir to his late father's title as Count Roussillon. Bertram has become a ward of the ailing King and travels to court in Paris, accompanied by his "equivocal companion" Paroles. At court, Bertram learns of a war in Italy, but he is forbidden from enlisting due to his youth. Hoping to win the King's favour through her medical knowledge, Helen follows Bertram. She convinces the King to allow her to treat his "fistula" and secures his promise that she may choose a husband from his courtiers if she is successful. She succeeds and chooses Bertram as her reward. Although the young Count is offended by the prospect of marrying someone he considers his inferior, he reluctantly agrees due to the King's insistence. To avoid consummating the marriage, Bertram flees to the war in Italy, vowing that he will not acknowledge Helen as his wife unless she becomes pregnant with his child and wears his signet ring. Disguised as a pilgrim, Helen follows her husband and arranges a bed-trick. She substitutes herself for Diana, the woman Bertram is attempting to woo, in order to fulfil his seemingly impossible demands. These intrigues culminate in a final trial scene in which Bertram's flimsy excuses are unravelled until he swears to love Helen.

Silence is a recurring theme within both plays. In *MM*, Isabella begins the play on the cusp of taking vows of silence (*MM*, 1.4.5–15),[4] then she is conspicuously silent in the final scene both at the discovery that her brother is alive and in response to

[4] All line and scene numbers for both plays refer to the *New Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works* (Shakespeare, 2016).

the Duke's marriage proposal (*MM*, 5.441–525). In *AW*, silence is silence is lauded as a virtue and as a rhetorical device (*AW*, 1.154–155). In both comedies silence is instrumental to the success of the bed tricks (*MM*, 4.1.64–66; *AW*, 4.2.54–65).

Such thematic foregrounding of silence in these, and other, Shakespearean works has not gone unnoticed. McGuire's *Speechless Dialect: Shakespeare's Open Silences* (1985) offers a performance history of the staging of significant silences in a selection of plays. The title is taken from *MM* and the volume dedicates an illuminating chapter to the play, highlighting six significant silences in the final act. Kermode in *Shakespeare's Language* (2000) positively evaluates Shakespeare's growing use of silence as a tool of his stagecraft as a sign of maturity in his works, noting that "an interest in silence might be thought to mark a general development away from rhetorical explicitness and towards a language that does not try to give everything away" (2000, pp. 19–20). Luckyj (1993, 2002) explores the link between reticence and resistance in female characters, positing silence as a multifaceted notion and as a possible means of strategical subversion. Hope investigates the complex interplay between silence and eloquence in Renaissance literature (2010), a topic also explored by Coussement-Boillot and Sukic (2007). Bigliazzi (2018) elucidates the psychological implications of the link between visual and verbal reticence in *Macbeth*. Rovine (1987) discusses the functions of silence in several plays (mainly tragedies) and similarly Muller explores the communicative value of some dramatic silences (2018).

This contribution seeks to examine the pragmatic nature of the negotiation of silence within the two problem comedies. The primary research questions are: How are accords of silence negotiated among characters? What pragmatic strategies are used to impose silence on others, to remain silent and to break the silence of one's interlocutor? How do these complex lin-

guistic interactions contribute to our understanding of the central questions of the play. How can these silences be interpreted and employed in performances of the plays? Such issues will be explored through the qualitative pragmatic analysis of a selection of salient scenes.

2. Silent Eloquence – "Be checked for silence, but never taxed for speech"

Both texts foreground the strategic, pragmatic functions of silence within interpersonal communication. The Countess (*AW*) in her maternal advice to Bertram instructs him to: "Be checked for silence / But never taxed for speech" (*AW*, 1.1.54–55), a proverbial directive which emphasises the value of politically strategic reticence and echoes the Gricean maxim of Quantity.[5] Such a sentiment is later reiterated by Lavatch:

> CLOWN
> So that you had her wrinkles and I her money, I would she did as you say.
> PAROLES
> Why, *I say nothing.*
> CLOWN
> Marry, *you are the wiser man, for many a man's tongue shakes out his master's undoing.* To say nothing, to do nothing, to know nothing, and to have nothing, is to be a great part of your title, which is within a very little of nothing.
> PAROLES
> Away, thou'rt a knave. (*AW*, 2.4.16–22; emphasis added)

[5] "The category of quantity relates to the quantity of information provided, and under it fall the following maxims: 1. Make your conversation as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange). 2. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required" (Grice, 1989, p. 26).

Here the clown, Lavatch, mocks Paroles, the overly talkative braggart, sarcastically complimenting his (evident lack of) wisdom and silence. This is an instance of mock politeness: he pretends to compliment Paroles, yet his assertion (representative) is obviously insincere.[6] Indeed, as outlined by Hope in his chapter on "Discourse, Artifice and Silence", the early modern rhetorical tradition[7] prized eloquence not as mere verbosity, but rather the mastery of language, which includes the use of silence and precludes unnecessary speech (2010, p. 67). Paroles, who will eventually be harshly "taxed" for his garrulous and mendacious speech (*AW*, 4.3.238–275), gives contrasting advice[8] to the young Bertram, encouraging him to "use a more spacious ceremony to the noble lords" (*AW*, 1.3.48).

[6] Such a strategy is defined in Culpeper's model as "*Sarcasm or mock politeness* – the FTA (Face Threatening Act) is performed with the use of politeness strategies that are obviously insincere, and thus remain surface realisations" (1996, p. 356).

[7] Hope reconstructs the figure of Mercury presented by the pictorial and literary arts in early modern England, illustrating his dual association with both eloquence ("skilled, planned language use" 2010, p. 58) and the punishment of those who fail to keep silent: "Although it might seem paradoxical for the god of eloquence to punish speaking in some tales, and urge silence by gesture, in fact this is entirely consistent with Renaissance conceptions of eloquence as the mastery of language; not, as our post-Romantic sensibility would tend to have it, profusion of language" (2010, pp. 67–68).

[8] He is overly verbose in his instruction to Bertram to be more expansive: "Use a more spacious ceremony to the noble lords; you have restrained yourself within the list of too cold an adieu. Be more expressive to them, for they wear themselves in the cap of the time; there do muster true gait, eat, speak, and move, under the influence of the most received star; and though the devil lead the measure, such are to be followed. After them, and take a more dilated farewell" (*AW*, 1.3.48–53). See also *AW*, 2.3.1–35 where Lafeu and Paroles engage in a sort of verbal one-upmanship.

Claudio's description of Isabella in *MM* further strengthens the association between silence and rhetorical prowess:

> CLAUDIO
> [...] for in her youth
> There is a prone and speechless dialect
> Such as move men. Beside, sh'ath prosperous art
> When she will play with reason and discourse,
> And well she can persuade.
> (*MM*, 1.3.80–84)

Of course, the ambiguity and possible sexual innuendo in terms like "prone" and "move men" have titillated critics for decades.[9] Notably, despite Isabella's undeniable rhetorical skills (*MM*, 2.2.28–162, 2.4.31–140) it will be her apparent silent acquiescence which finally, ostensibly produces the desired perlocutionary effect of persuading her tormentor. Thus, even for an able rhetorician such as Isabella, in some situations the most successful strategy is that of reticence. She will again use her rhetorical prowess in the final act, this time to aid Mariana in her plea for Angelo's life – interestingly Mariana's directives do not ask that Isabella actually *speak* in his favour but that she use her "speechless dialect":

> MARIANA
> Isabel,
> Sweet Isabel, *do yet but kneel* by me.
> Hold up your hands; *say nothing*; *I'll speak all.*
> They say best men are moulded out of faults,
> And, for the most, become much more the better
> For being a little bad. So may my husband.
> O Isabel, will you *not lend a knee*?
> (*MM*, 5.1.422–428; emphasis added)

[9] For a summary of some of the more relevant theories on the meaning of these lines see Kermode (2000, pp. 157–162).

The *New Oxford Shakespeare* notes that in Peter Brook's historic 1950 Stratford-upon-Avon production Isabella, played by Barbara Jefford, was instructed "to stand silent as long as the audience could bear it, before kneeling to plead for Angelo's life. This became one of the most famous pauses in modern theatre" (Bourus, 2017, p. 2267). An analysis of the turn management within the scene explains why such a pause was particularly significant. Mariana explicitly selects Isabella as the next speaker, Isabella's subsequent delay in commencing her turn creates a jarring attributable silence. Indeed, such silence in the hands of a courageous director and actors, can be stretched to an unbearable length, until Isabella kneels and speaks, pleading for her persecutor's mercy.

3. Censorship – "That which I durst not speak"

In *AW*, Bertram, perhaps heeding his mother's advice in 1.1, learns the value of silence. He has a significant and lengthy silence on stage, speaking remarkably little in 2.3 (one turn in 2.3.7) and falling silent until instructed by the King to take Helen as his wife, when he begins to loudly object (2.3.98). As noted by Gosset and Wilcox, some editors have deemed such a long silence a textual error and even postpone Bertram's entrance, attributing the earlier dialogue to Lafeu and Paroles exclusively (2019, p. 195). However, such solutions would inevitably interfere with the dual function of his mute presence on stage. Firstly, it is likely that in 2.3.10-35 Lafeu repeatedly attempts to select the young Count for the successive turn but is continually interrupted by the fastidiously self-selecting Paroles (Gossett & Wilcox, 2019, p. 195). Secondly, Bertram's prolonged silence here may "convey discontent, lack of interest, or deference to his elders" (Loughnane, 2017, p. 2298). This example further demonstrates how silence provides a space that welcomes experimentation in performance. Bertram

could be played as aloof and disinterested, or Lafeu's failed attempts to engage him in conversation due to Paroles' interruptions could be heightened for comic effect. Thus, a character's silence has the potential to produce a range of illocutionary acts and subsequent perlocutionary effects.

Bertram's initial attempts to refuse his royally mandated marriage with Helen provoke the King's outraged threats (*AW*, 2.3.138–155). Bertram eventually capitulates. In the ensuing dialogue, what is left unsaid is particularly significant:

> KING
> [...] *Speak, thine answer.*
> BERTRAM
> Pardon, my gracious lord; for *I submit*
> My fancy to your eyes [...]
> KING
> *Take her by the hand*
> And *tell her she is thine*: to whom I promise
> A counterpoise, if not to thy estate,
> A balance more replete.
> BERTRAM
> *I take her hand.*
> KING
> Good fortune and the favour of the King
> Smile upon this contract.
> (*AW*, 2.3.158–160, 166–170; emphasis added)

Bertram is bid to answer the King, who uses a directive ("Speak, thine answer"), he does so with the preferred response of obeying the King's orders and seeking forgiveness (l. 159). However, when the King instructs him to both "take her by the hand" and "tell her she is thine", Bertram fails to comply with the second directive. The King selects him for a turn in which Betram should, ideally, both take Helen's hand and produce an affirmative reply regarding their union. Bertram's response is

relevant, debatably truthful and perspicuous, yet he does not provide the full and complete response required, thus violating the maxim of quantity. Bertram's violation can be seen as co-operative – Bertram's reticence creates an implicature which speaks to his resistance to the match. The implicature is conveyed at least to the audience and, presumably, understood by the other characters on stage. The partial response also provokes a complex Transition Relevance Place (TRP). Bertram completes his turn (l. 168b) without addressing Helen (as instructed) and without selecting the next speaker. This creates a conversational gap which ends when the King self-selects (l. 169); this lapse could potentially be extended or emphasised in performance in order to underscore Bertram's partial and reluctant compliance and further mark the problematic nature of consent in the play.

Later in *AW*, Bertram uses selective reticence as a survival tactic, intentionally deferring his confession to the King to a later, written communication:

> BERTRAM
> It shall be so. I'll send her to my house,
> Acquaint my mother with my hate to her,
> And wherefore I am fled, write to the King
> That which *I durst not speak.*
> (*AW*, 2.3.260–264, emphasis added)

Bertram is acutely aware of the consequences which would result from his continuing to verbally contest his marriage to Helen. He chooses to flee to the war in Tuscany, silently escaping both the King's anger and the consummation of the marriage. The content of Bertram's letter to the King is not revealed within the text, we are only acquainted with his bitter correspondence to his mother and his wife (*AW*, 3.2.16–22; 3.2.50–53, 89). It is Paroles who makes explicit the most dangerous

sentiment which Bertram self-censors ("durst not speak") and encourages Bertram to remain silent regarding the matter: "The King has done you wrong, *but hush 'tis so*" (*AW*, 2.4.275; emphasis added). Paroles' "hush 'tis so" (a directive instructing selective silence) foregrounds the problematic nature of Bertram's status as ward of the King and the related issues of consent which will be exacerbated by the bed-trick.

In *MM* Angelo fails to control and censor Isabella. Firstly he attempts to persuade her to sleep with him by promising to free her brother:

> ANGELO
> Plainly conceive, I love you.
> ISABELLA
> My brother did love Juliet,
> And you tell me that he shall die for it.
> ANGELO
> He shall not, Isabel, if you give me love.
> ISABELLA
> I know your virtue hath a licence in't,
> Which seems a little fouler than it is,
> To pluck on others.
> ANGELO
> Believe me, on mine honour,
> My words express my purpose.
> ISABELLA
> Ha, little honour to be much believed,
> And most pernicious purpose! Seeming, seeming!
> I will proclaim thee, Angelo; look for't.
> Sign me a present pardon for my brother,
> Or with an outstretched throat I'll tell the world aloud
> What man thou art.
> ANGELO
> Who will believe thee, Isabel?
> My unsoiled name, th'austereness of my life,

My vouch against you, and my place i'th' state,
Will so your accusation overweigh
That you shall stifle in your own report,
And smell of calumny. I have begun,
And now I give my sensual race the rein.
Fit thy consent to my sharp appetite.
Lay by all nicety and prolixious blushes
That banish what they sue for. Redeem thy brother
By yielding up thy body to my will,
Or else he must not only die the death,
But thy unkindness shall his death draw out
To ling'ring sufferance. Answer me tomorrow,
Or by the affection that now guides me most,
I'll prove a tyrant to him. As for you,
Say what you can, my false o'erweighs your true.
(*MM*, 2.4.141–170)

In (l. 144) Angelo commits himself to a future action, promising to not kill Claudio if Isabella will agree to have sex with him. This is a commissive speech act (the kind of utterance used to make vows, promises, threats, etc). However, it is infelicitous and deceptive, he has no intention of keeping this promise; later (*MM*.4.2), when Angelo believes that he has bedded Isabella, he sends a note ordering Claudio's swift execution. Isabella, when she realises what Angelo requires, replies with a commissive of her own – threatening to publicly shame him for his carnality and corruption (ll. 151–154). However her threats are immediately met counter-threats. Angelo is confident that she would not be believed and raises the stakes; he threatens to deal more harshly with her brother if she does not comply with his orders (ll. 165–169). Isabella's threat (commissive) failed to frighten her opponent and instead provoked a harsh, violent series of counter-threats. However, she neither remains silent nor "stifle⌈s⌋ in her own report" – she is overheard by the Duke-as-Friar telling

her brother to resign himself to his fate. Thus, by confiding in the Duke-as-Friar she resists Angelo's attempts to vanquish her and exposes his abuse of power.

4. Reticence as Resistance – "Only sin and hellish obstinacy tie thy tongue"

In *AW*, Helen's initial refusal to divulge her romantic feelings towards Bertram to his mother, the Countess, is described, by the Countess herself, as a wilful, dangerous form of resistance ("Only sin and hellish obstinacy tie thy tongue", *AW*, 1.3.151–152). The Countess uses a variety of tactics to convince Helen to disclose her affection – first goading her with claims to be her mother, then declaring her own knowledge of Helen's secret and finally berating her with a quick succession of directives. Indeed, the Countess commands her to speak truthfully and directly no less than 6 times in this scene (1.3.139–163: "tell me true"; "tell me then tis so"; "speak, is't so?"; I charge thee [...] to tell me truly"; "Go not about"; "Come, come disclose"). In employing such forceful directives in order to break Helen's silence about her love for Bertram she invokes the both the maxims of quality ("tell me *true*", "tell me *truly*") and manner ("Go not about"). This verbal assault is, eventually, successful – Helen confesses her love for the Countess' son and her plans to follow him to court.

Similarly in *MM* Claudio's reticence about his "offence" functions as a form of resistance, in this case a kind of protest against the unjust government and his unwarrantedly harsh death sentence:

> LUCIO
> [...] What's thy offence, Claudio?
> CLAUDIO
> What but to speak of would offend again.

LUCIO
What, is't murder?
CLAUDIO
No.
LUCIO
Lechery?
CLAUDIO
Call it so.
(*MM*, 1.2.37–39)

Claudio offers a vague (violating the maxim of manner) dispreferred response to Lucio's rogative, prompting his friend to begin listing crimes in order of their severity in Angelo's Vienna. When asked if he is guilty of murder Claudio's response is direct and cooperative, but he fails to self-select and offer the information that Lucio requires, so Lucio diligently continues his list of crimes. Claudio's response to the accusation of lechery is deliberately vague, questioning the very nature of the offence.

The most oft-cited silence in *MM* is that of Isabella's failure to respond to the Duke's twofold proposal of marriage in the final act. McGuire contextualises this non-response within a complex network of "open silences" which resonate together in a sort of symphony of silence: Barnadine and Angelo do not speak when pardoned, Angelo and Mariana exchange no words as a married couple, Isabella and Claudio do not speak when they meet on stage (1985, pp. 63–96; also Aebischer, 2008). It is this complex interplay of multiple, intertwined silences that makes *MM* so problematic, as McGuire states:

> The six open silences of the final scene of *Measure for Measure* and the groupings that can emerge as a result of the links among them give the play an extraordinary freedom, a capacity for contingency and change unmatched [...] We cannot even be certain what kind of play *Measure for Measure* is. (1985, pp. 95–96)

The mute presences of Angelo, Mariana, Barnadine, Claudio and Isabella on stage starkly contrast with Lucio's garrulou-sness, comically unhindered by the Duke's continued calls for silence[10] ("Silence that fellow"; "For the benefit of silence, would thou wert so too.", "Sirrah, no more", etc.). As the Duke's directives towards the loquacious Lucio fail to produce the desired perlocutionary effect (silent subordination), so too do his attempts to produce a response from Isabella. His first proposal of marriage to Isabella invites her to respond:

> DUKE
> If he be like your brother, for his sake
> Is he pardoned; and for your lovely sake,
> Give me your hand and *say you will be mine.*
> He is my brother too. But fitter time for that.
> (*MM*, 5.1.478-481, emphasis added)

Much like the King to Bertram, he invites her to acquiesce to the marriage with both verbal and gestural signs ("give me your hand", "say you will be mine"). What follows seems to be a sort of aborted TRP. It is unclear whether the Duke is simply failing to adhere to the basic rules of turn-taking[11] (if the first speaker,

[10] McGuire also problematises Angelo's silence: "The more often the Duke calls and the more persistently Angelo stays silent, the less certain we can be that Angelo feels the love that in a comedy we would expect a newly married husband and wife to share. The combination of the Duke's calls for love and Angelo's enduring silence also raises the issue of the limits to the power that the Duke exercises during these final moments" (McGuire, 1985, p. 70). While the Duke's power to produce the desired perlocutionary effect is certainly limited in this scene (Lucio, Isabella), I have not found any concrete examples of unheeded directives ordering Angelo to speak in these lines.

[11] The rules are as given as follows: "Rule 1 – applies initially at the first TRP of any turn. a) If C selects N in current turn, then C must stop speaking, and N must speak next, transition occurring at the first TRP after N-selection.

S1, selects another speaker, S2, then S1 must stop speaking to allow S2 to speak), neglecting to end his turn in order to produce the transition, or whether there is an awkward pause, after which he again self-selects and continues. If we take it that the Duke barrels through the speech without allowing Isabella to speak then the scene would present a particular set of problems in performance (Isabella struggling to take her turn, etc). However, I believe that there is even more dramatic significance in the possibility of a silence that is conversationally attributable to Isabella. If the Duke pauses, even momentarily, and then hurries on, Isabella has successfully declined to self-select, producing a powerful AS. Isabella's silence can also be seen as giving rise to an implicature by opting out of the CP. The arising implicature may be understood as mute acceptance, disgust, joyful shock or any number of possible reactions by disambiguation through with physical cues during performance.[12] Such a silence foregrounds the kind of politically problematic resistance through reticence that is a source of deep anxiety for the early modern audience (Luckyj, 2002, pp. 14–39). In his second proposal the Duke does not invite Isabella to respond to the "motion [which] much imports [her] good", merely inviting her to "a willing ear incline" (*MM*, 5.1.522-3). Thus, Isabella, who began the play wishing to no longer speak with men (*MM*, 1.4.7–

b) If C does not select N, then any other party may self-select, first speaker gaining rights to the next turn. c) If C has not selected N, and no other party self-selects under option b, then C may but need not continue i.e., claims to a further turn constructional unit. Rule 2 – applies at all subsequent TRPs When rule 1c has been applied by C, then at the next TRP rules 1 a–c apply, and recursively at the next TRP, until speaker change is affected" (Levinson, 1983, p. 298 adapted from Sacks et al, 1974).

[12] For an insightful analysis of several different performative approaches to the ambiguity of the final scene see (Aebischer, 2008).

14), ends inhabiting the contested site between silent resistance and being silenced.

5. Conclusions

The right to speak, or indeed the right to remain silent, provoked deep political and social anxieties in the early modern era (see Luckyj, 2002; Snyder, 2012) – such anxieties still resonate with modern audiences. Issues of silence and consent have been problematised in recent Shakespeare productions (Aebischer, 2008; Bachrach, 2023) and in contemporary dramaturgy (e.g., *Consent* by Nina Raine, 2017). Furthermore, silencing others or making them speak requires the use of various pragmatic strategies. Angelo fails to silence Isabella with his threats against her brother and, eventually, it is not so much her false assertion that he has violated her which leads to his downfall, but her mute complicity in the bed trick. Thus her "prone and speechless dialect" proves a powerful tool in obtaining justice. *AW* foregrounds the consequences of hasty, mendacious and overly loquacious speech in the figure of Paroles' – whose very name tells of his garrulous nature. He undergoes a sort of *chiarivari* style punishment and duly adjusts his speech,[13] or at least attempts to, claiming "I know more than I'll speak" (*AW*, 5.3.249).

The pragmatic analysis of salient examples of directives and commissives imposing silence, directives forbidding silence and the complexity of skipping or denying turns in conversation has demonstrated that "silence in early modern England was an unstable and highly contested site" (Luckyj, 2002, p. 39). Both *AW* and *MM* challenge misconceptions about silence. Rovine, while acknowledging that Shakespeare's plays use various kinds

[13] Another notable change in Paroles' linguistic output after his public shaming is that he learns to lie using off-record strategies (Beville, 2021).

of silences as a means of contributing to the overall theatrical effect of the play, oversimplifies female silence in his analysis, stating that Shakespeare's plays present "a refraction of society where men are expected to be aggressive in action and word and women are expected to be submissive and reticent" (1987, p. 51). Such a view would reduce speech and silence to a mere parallel of the dichotomy of power and powerlessness, yet it is evident that these texts present a multifaceted view of silence. Through the pragmatic analysis of particularly salient negotiations of interactional silence within *AW* and *MM* the open-endedness of silence within dramatic texts has been revealed. Undeniably, characters operated within play-worlds which reflect the societal expectations noted above. However, such expectations are not always unquestioningly met. The characters in these plays strategically employ varying forms of silence in order to challenge and circumvent the societal constraints under which they find themselves. Reticence has been seen here as performing many, overlapping and interlocking functions: a tool in dissimulation, a rhetorical instrument, a form of resistance, a means of self-preservation and much more. Luckyj explains,

> It is misleading and historically inaccurate to locate power in speech alone – or even to construct speech and silence as binary opposites. [...] alternative paradigms constructed silence as an antirhetorical space of resistance, inscrutable, unreadable and potentially unruly and chaotic. (2002, p. 39)

In the light of such observations the present study, therefore, reveals that the analysis of the pragmatic strategies used to negotiate complex accords of speech and silence in these plays serves to illuminate their aesthetic and textual functions. Such analyses should be brought to bear on the performance and the critical evaluation of interactional silence within play texts.

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"O woman, scurvie woman, beastly woman": Taboo language, impoliteness, and gender issues in Fletcher's Bonduca

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1. Introduction: *Bonduca* and Taboo

John Fletcher's *Bonduca* was first published in 1647 in Beaumont and Fletcher's First Folio, although its only extant scribal manuscript may have been written between 1627 and 1637 (see Werstine, 2012, pp. 12–59 for questions about foul papers and *Bonduca*'s manuscript[s]). In 1951, W. W. Greg, in addition to recognizing Fletcher as *Bonduca*'s sole author, attempted the first edition of the scribal manuscript he attributed to Edward Knight, bookkeeper at the King's Men, while in 1979 Cyrus Hoy published the first edition of the play based on both the manuscript and the Folio texts (Ioppolo, 1990, pp. 62–64). As Hoy's CUP text remains the most authoritative and complete edition of *Bonduca* to date, in this article act, scene and line numbers are taken from the CUP 2008 reprint.

As for the play's date of composition and first performance, most critics suggest that *Bonduca*, often labelled by scholars a tragicomedy or romance (Frénée-Hutchins, 2013, p. 178) despite being styled as a tragedy in the Folio, was not written before 1609 or later than 1614, with Alfred Harbage (1964, p. 100) and Andrew Gurr (1980, p. 220) proposing the interval 1611–1614,

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Samantha Frénée-Hutchins asserting that "it was first presented to a London public by the King's Men sometime in 1613 or 1614" (2013, p. 177), and Martin Wiggins suggesting 1614 as best guess (2012, pp. 400–404).

Although *Bonduca* shares some themes and chronotopic coordinates with such plays as Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* (1610) and William Rowley's *A Shoemaker a Gentleman* (1618),[1] it has heretofore received intermittent critical attention. Thus, the following brief plot synopsis by Clare Jowitt (2003, pp. 477–478) may prove useful:

> *Bonduca* opens with Bonduca, Nennius, and Caratach celebrating the successful defense of their homeland against Roman invasionary forces. The play then switches to the Roman army camp, and we see the hungry, war-weary Romans and discover that a Roman captain, Junius, has fallen in love with one of Bonduca's daughters, Bonvica. [...] Penius, one of the commanders, fails to marshal his troops when the general requests them, and Roman foot soldiers break ranks to go foraging for food. When the Romans are caught by the Britons, instead of having them executed, as Bonduca desires, Caratach feeds and releases them. Furthermore, when Bonduca's daughter hears of Junius's love, she plans to lure him into their camp and ambush him. Caratach berates Bonvica and her sister for their lack of honor and again releases the Romans. When the forces finally meet, [...] the Britons are defeated; Caratach and Hengo are forced into hiding while Bonduca refuses to submit to Roman rule and, with her daughters, kills herself. While in Caratach's care, Hengo is killed by the Romans and, in his grief, Caratach

[1] Both plays were written more or less in the same period as *Bonduca*, thus evincing a growing interest in the Roman conquest of the British Isles at a time when British colonialism was expanding and Jamestown, the first British settlement in America, had very recently been established (see Chernaik, 2011, pp. 219–243).

> surrenders and the play closes with him about to depart for Rome as a "noble friend" (5.3.185).

Most of the critics writing about the play focus mainly on its themes. Moreover, they devote ample space to summarising and discussing the strengths, and in particular the shortcomings, of previous studies. Kelly Neil's lucid analysis of the multiple critical readings of *Bonduca* somehow justifies the critics' contradictory views of this Fletcherian play:

> the play provokes contradictory responses to Bonduca, ⌈and⌉ it encourages the audience to evaluate the process of judgement itself ⌈…⌉. Critics have responded to the play's historical mimesis differently, some reading the play as a commentary on England's colonial ventures in the Americas or a topical satire pointing to the rumors about homoerotic relationships at James's court. (2014, p. 90)

Ultimately, Neil's words help to pinpoint some of the most debated issues the play tackles. If both Paul Green (1982) and Frénée-Hutchins deal with the antithetical structure of the play and its internal dichotomies between Britons and Romans, honour and cowardice, masculine and feminine, Andrew Hickman (1989) treats such pairs in terms of parallelisms, somehow renouncing an antithetical reading of *Bonduca*. More recent critics have focused on the literary and cultural universe of the Fletcherian text, thus dealing with such topics as gender issues (Calder, 1996; Crawford, 1999; Stanivukovic, 1999; Frénée-Hutchins, 2013; Bretz, 2015; Johnson, 2017; Lovascio, 2020) and imperialistic readings of the play (Jowitt, 2003; Wang, 2012; Steffen, 2017; Lovascio, 2022), but to my knowledge no critic has examined *Bonduca* through the lenses of linguistics and, above all, historical pragmatics. This approach, as the chosen methodology for my analysis, reveals new and interesting details about the pragmatic choices made by Fletcher and inte-

grates previous readings of the play with the help of linguistic analyses. As Thomas Anderson and Scott Crossley write, "stylistic interpretation can enrich literary approaches [...] and [...] literary interpretation complements linguistic inquiry" (2011, p. 193).

My approach – i.e., face-based pragmatics and (im)politeness theory – is presented in the next section. What is worth noting here is the specific thematic content to be analysed through pragmalinguistics, so that on the one hand the play is introduced more in detail through its thematic nuclei, and on the other hand the field of research is well defined. To this end, the notion of taboo is introduced and taboo-related topics are presented. According to the *OED*, the lemma "taboo" entered English as a loanword from the Tongan language in the late-eighteenth century. It was introduced by Captain John Cook and it meant "set apart, forbidden" in the original Polynesian language. In its modern definition, a taboo is "[a] social or religious custom prohibiting or restricting a particular practice or forbidding association with a particular person, place, or thing" (*OED*, n. 1) or "[a] practice that is prohibited or restricted by social or religious custom" (*OED*, n. 1.1). According to Keith Allan and Kate Burridge (2006, p. 1), a taboo is "a proscription of behaviour that affects everyday life. [...] Taboos arise out of social constraints on the individual's behaviour where it can cause discomfort, harm or injury". These definitions underline the deep connection between taboo and its social context. For this reason, close examination at the social context of the play under scrutiny here, aside from its separate time frames,[2] may help us

[2] Borrowing from Genettian narratology, different time frames must be distinguished in this play. Indeed, in chronological order, there is a plot time when the fictional events supposedly take place (60–61 CE, during the Celtic

understand what in fact taboo was in Roman Britain and early modern England. In this article, the notion of taboo is approached from two different angles, the point of contact of which is the theory of (im)politeness. On the one hand, taboo topics in *Bonduca* are presented and dealt with, and, on the other hand, taboo language is examined. Let me begin by commenting on a series of taboo topics in Fletcher's play and leave the discussion of taboo language for the next section of the article.

The most evident taboo topic in *Bonduca* is suicide. Variously interpreted as a stoic, Senecan and heroic act by three female characters who "appropriate a typical Roman fashion, [being] defeated by male power" (Lovascio, 2020, p. 174), an appropriate punishment for such "an incompetent and irresponsible war leader" as Bonduca (Frénée-Hutchins, 2013, 180), or "the vehicle through which Fletcher critiques the monarch's authority" (Neil, 2014, p. 91), suicide in the play, as in early modern England in general, is a prohibited act to be condemned. As Anderson and Crossley state in paraphrasing and quoting from MacDonald and Murphy's 1990 *Sleepless Souls: Suicide in Early Modern England*,

> those who committed suicide were rarely exonerated for their crime: "Over 95 per cent of the men and women who killed themselves between 1485 and 1600 were convicted as *felones de se* [a felon himself]; fewer than 2 per cent were excused as persons *non compos mentis* [not of sound mind]. […] The rigour with which the law against suicide was enforced […] distinguishes this period from the centuries before and afterwards". (2011, p. 194)

Queen Bonduca's revolt against the Romans), an author time (the 1600s) and a reader/audience time.

Moreover, "suicides in England peaked between the years 1600 and 1610" (2011, p. 194). Whatever the gender-related, ideological, or political meaning that Bonduca and her daughters' suicides acquire in the play,[3] the position of those critics (e.g., Curran, 1997; Crawford, 1999; Jowitt, 2003; Nielson, 2009) who condemn Bonduca's "lack of self-control [and] suggest that [she] is a [...] character inviting censure" (Neil, 2014, pp. 89–90) seems more persuasive.

Another taboo topic in *Bonduca* is love. Like suicide, love has indisputable gender implications, since, as suggested by Alison Calder, "love is something that feminizes: men are fighters, not lovers. The equation of masculinity with military and sexual prowess precludes the idea of love" (1996, p. 223). In other words, women in the play – as in most Fletcherian works – are "a threat to male bonding and identity" (Johnson, 2017, p. 88). Petillius's and Junius's love and desire for Bonduca's daughters is sick, as there is no place for feminizing feeling in the military world of the play. As Julie Crawford states, "male love for women is seen as threatening to male power" (1999, p. 367). Nevertheless, if, on the one hand, "[t]he language of erotic love is transgressive in the military arena when applied to male-female relationships" (Calder, 1996, p. 224), on the other hand, "[t]he male military bond [...] supplants the bond with the female, [...] indicat[ing] not homosexual desire, but homosocial desire; that is, it is the bond that is eroticized, rather than one individual's response to another" (Calder, 1996, pp. 225–226). After all, it is Bonduca herself who associates love and taboo immediately before committing suicide: "mercy and love are sins in Rome and hell" (4.4.12).

[3] It is worth noticing also the similarities between Bonduca's suicide and Cleopatra's self-killing in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, as suggested by Green (1982, p. 311) and Lovascio (2022, p. 19).

In *Bonduca*, love is closely related to two other pivotal topics: rape and necrophilia. Although most scholars agree that rape is a taboo topic in contemporary times – and, therefore, in reader/audience time, in narratological terms – rape was not a taboo topic *per se* in early modern England, although rape-centred lines offer interesting cues for the analysis of taboo language in the play, as will be shown later. As Quay succinctly puts it, in early modern English drama, "rape is strangely pleasurable to read about" (1995, p. 13). Bonduca's daughters have already been raped at the beginning of the play, so that "Roman culpability is technically nonexistent" (Green, 1982, p. 311). Until their suicide in act 4 they seek vengeance against the Romans, as they have lost their honour and try to avenge themselves by capturing Junius, Decius, Curius, other Roman soldiers and their servants. But since, as Crawford states, "⌜t⌝he crime in this play ⌜…⌝ is disarming men, not rape" (1999, p. 363), Caratach convinces the two women to free their captives, because it is they who "should have kept ⌜their⌝ legs close" (3.5.71). Not even "Saint Lucrece" (4.4.117) is spared the accusation of being "a lustful whore" (Lovascio, 2020, p. 176) in *Bonduca*. When assailed by the Roman army, Bonduca's elder daughter, far from showing female solidarity towards a Roman emblem of chastity, shouts at Suetonius's soldiers that Lucrece had not died for honour, "Tarquin topped her well, / And mad she could not hold him, bled" (4.4.118–119). Lucrece's rape is seen by a woman as "a desperately addictive enjoyment to ⌜Tarquin's⌝ sexual prowess", being moved by an "unrestrainable desire to keep Tarquin for herself after their encounter" (Lovascio, 2020, p. 176; 2022, p. 117).

On the contrary, necrophilia was "more than a discomfiting taboo" (Wicks, 2016, p. 153) in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England. Petillus's passion for Bonduca's elder daughter, after her "courageous suicide, belittles the effect of Bonduca's tragedy" (Drábek, 2010, p. 104) by introducing a taboo topic later mocked by Junius in 5.2.16–23. The relationship between

love and necrophilia in terms of taboo is brilliantly illustrated by Frénée-Hutchins: "Contact with native women is represented as something which could lead to degeneracy and a loss of military judgment, as shown in Petillus's necrophilic desire for Bonduca's first daughter" (2013, p. 189).

Lastly, a paramount taboo theme in *Bonduca* is the representation of powerful women onstage, a topic closely connected with King James I's anxiety regarding the spectre of his predecessor.[4] As Crawford has noted, "[a]fter James accedes to the throne, viragos and warrior women are no longer celebrated and rarely even ambivalently represented either textually or on stage" (1999, p. 360). According to Frénée-Hutchins, such a misogynistic behaviour by the Stuart King highlighted the "male anxiety over powerful women" (2013, p. 179) that characterized his reign and that is often associated with witchcraft in the play.[5]

2. Methodology: Taboo and (Im)politeness Theory

As for methodological matters concerning taboo language and linguistic strategies used to deal with taboo topics, I draw on face-based (im)politeness theories (in particular Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson's 1987 *Politeness* and Jonathan Culpeper's 1996 and other revisions of their study). These theoretical approaches are

[4] Maximilien de Béthune, first Duke of Sully, in his *Memoirs*, noted that "so strong an affectation prevailed [at James's court] to obliterate the memory of that great princess [Queen Elizabeth], that she was never spoken of, and even the mention of her name industriously avoided" (cit. in Bergeron, 1991, pp. 85–86).

[5] On the relationship between witchcraft and fear for female power during James I's reign, see Spoto, 2010. Nevertheless, if one agrees with those critics who have placed *Bonduca*'s date of composition between 1609 and 1614, it is also worth noting that in 1612 "an extraordinary witch trial" took place in Lancashire, when ten inhabitants of the Forest of Pendle "were sent to the scaffold in Lancaster" (Baratta, 2013, p. 185).

integrated with Allan and Burridge's (2006) X-phemism model. Pragmalinguistic analysis is particularly suited to taboo language and taboo topics/themes, as both share context as a common denominator. In Culpeper's words, "both taboo language and impolite language [...] [are] sensitive to local contexts" (2018, p. 28).

In the Introduction to *Forbidden Words*, Allan and Burridge declare that they "examine politeness and impoliteness as they interact with orthophemism (straight talking), euphemism (sweet talking) and dysphemism (speaking offensively)" (2006, p. 1), an examination carried out in the second chapter entitled "Sweet Talking and Offensive Language" (pp. 29–54). When defining the three language expressions above, the authors identify taboo with dysphemism, since it is defined as "a word or phrase with connotations that are offensive either about the denotatum and/or to people addressed or overhearing the utterance" (p. 31). With this definition in mind, I argue that Fletcher's *Bonduca* is a play linguistically centred on dysphemisms and hence on taboo language, which, according to Culpeper, comprises impolite intensifiers that "mark a negative attitude towards the target" (Culpeper, 2018, p. 40). Indeed, the play's antithetical structure (if one agrees with such scholars as Green or Frénée-Hutchins) and the conflicting themes dealt with result in an abundance of negative attitudes displayed by various characters towards each other and an offensive use of language, as will be seen in the next section.

It was Culpeper himself who, in his pivotal study *Towards an Anatomy of Impoliteness* (1996), inserted taboo words (what Allan and Burridge would have called dysphemisms ten years later) within a face-based model of (im)politeness.[6] Indeed, Culpeper lists taboo language as the ninth of ten output strategies

[6] No mention of taboo language seems included in Brown and Levinson's work about politeness, as Culpeper affirms (2018, p. 30).

of positive impoliteness[7] and defines it as to "swear, or use of abusive profane language" (1996, p. 358).[8] In 2018, when contributing to *The Oxford Handbook of Taboo Words and Language*, edited by Allan, Culpeper reinforces this connection between impoliteness and taboo language, stating that the latter "is [...] a subgroup within impoliteness" while "impoliteness covers much more than taboo language" (p. 29).

Nevertheless, what seemed to be a one-to-one association between taboo words and dysphemisms blurs in the rest of the article, and Culpeper focuses more on possible connections between euphemisms and politeness, since "taboo language is not a simple opposite of some aspect of politeness. [...] [E]uphemisms are not used as general-purpose emotional downtoners in a variety of speech acts [and] are virtually absent from politeness theory" (pp. 30–39). Therefore, euphemisms (and orthophemisms, one might add) escape a one-to-one correspondence with Brown and Levinson's and Culpeper's model of (im)politeness; hence, it might be worth departing from Allan and Burridge's definitions before framing them within a face-based model of (im)politeness. They believe that euphemisms and orthophemisms "avoid possible loss of face by the speaker, and also the hearer [and] arise from the conscious or unconscious self-censoring; they are used to avoid the speaker being embarrassed and/or ill thought of and, at the same time, to avoid embarrassing and/or offending the hearer or some third party. This coincides with the speaker being polite" (2006, pp. 32–33).

[7] In this article, due to considerations of space and coherence regarding the main focus of analysis, neither Brown and Levinson's, nor Culpeper's models of (im)politeness, are presented in their entirety. For a thorough overview of their theories, see Culpeper, 2011; Del Villano, 2018, pp. 29–38, 43–52.

[8] As Culpeper himself admits, "this is unfortunate because [...] it oversimplifies the role of taboo language in the context of impoliteness" (2018, p. 31).

Hence, Allan and Burridge insert both euphemisms and orthophemisms within politeness[9] (albeit not mentioning either Brown and Levinson's or Culpeper's face-based models) and then distinguish them:

- An orthophemism is typically more formal and more direct (or literal) than the corresponding euphemism.
- A euphemism is typically more colloquial and figurative (or indirect) than the corresponding orthophemism. (p. 33)

The scheme below (Figure 1) illustrates the X-phemism model by Allan and Burridge, where preferred = polite and dispreferred = impolite:

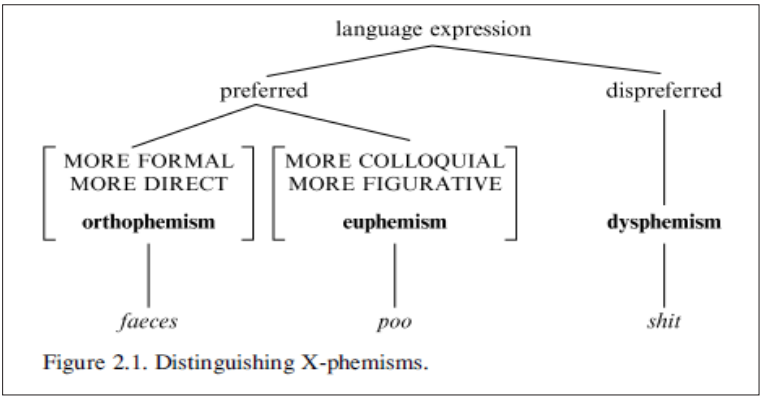

Fig. 1: X-phemism model by Allan and Burridge (2006, p. 34)

[9] This somehow contradicts Culpeper's assertion that "euphemisms are virtually absent from politeness theory" (2018, p. 39), if one considers Allan and Burridge's a politeness theory of taboo language. See also Crespo-Fernández 2005 for another face-based attempt to contextualise euphemisms within a politeness framework.

Prima facie, aside from an abundant use of dysphemism as an impolite strategy, the Fletcherian language in *Bonduca* seems to be orthophemistic – rather than euphemistic – when dealing with polite strategies. For instance, Caratach's straight talk to Bonduca and her daughters, when not dysphemistic and tabooed, is definitely orthophemistic, since directness is the most evident characteristic of his language.

Euphemisms, as intended by Allan and Burridge, are overly polite and, in my opinion, can fit at least two of the five super strategies for the management of face-threatening acts (FTAs)[10] by Brown and Levinson: 4. Off-record strategies and 5. Don't do the FTA. A euphemism is an off-record strategy when the language expression is used ironically or sarcastically. In fact, according to Brown and Levinson, off-record strategies are "metaphor and irony, rhetorical questions, understatement, tautologies, all kinds of hints as to what a speaker wants or means to communicate, without doing so directly, so that the meaning is to some degree negotiable" (1987, 69). Ironic euphemism is indeed something the meaning of which is negotiable since both speaker and hearer can (pretend not to) understand the irony or sarcasm intended. Off-record strategies imply a violation of Grice's conversational maxims, and in particular those of quality and manner.[11]

[10] FTAs "are potential weapons in the mouths of speakers that can destabilise the balance that should prevail in conversation. If there is a strong will or need to avoid conflict, face will be saved or reinforced, whereas a lack of interest in keeping the conversation 'safe' or neutral for the speakers will cause more evident face threats" (Del Villano, 2018, pp. 31–32).

[11] There are four Gricean maxims: Relevance, Quantity, Quality and Manner. Ironic euphemisms violate the maxim of Quality, since "be ironic" is one of the off-record strategies Brown and Levinson list among those aimed at breaking conversational quality. Yet they also violate the maxim of Manner, inasmuch as "be ambiguous" and "be vague" are two off-record strategies used to infringe upon manner. In fact, as Pedro J. Chamizo-Domínguez puts it, "[v]

When a euphemism has no ironic purpose it can be defined as a genteelism, "[a] word or expression used because it is thought to be socially more acceptable than the everyday word" (*OED*, n.). In this case, I would argue, euphemisms intended as genteelisms correspond to Brown and Levinson's strategy "Don't do the FTA", thus maximising one's face vulnerability and the risk of face loss by the speaker.

Orthophemism, instead, is intended as straight, neutral talk, which is not "sweet-sounding, evasive or overly polite (euphemistic), nor harsh, blunt or offensive (dysphemistic)" (Allan and Burridge, 2006, p. 29). Orthophemism may coincide with what Brown and Levinson define as on-record FTA strategies without redressive action (baldly): "S and H both tacitly agree that the relevance of face demands may be suspended in the interests of urgency or efficiency; [...] where S is vastly superior in power to H, or can enlist audience support to destroy H's face without losing his own" (1987, p. 69). As demonstrated in the next section, this is exactly what happens in *Bonduca*, when Bonduca, her daughters, or even Caratach believe their conversational and political power is much higher than that of their interlocutors. That is the reason why there are more orthophemisms than euphemisms in the play in terms of taboo language.

Nevertheless, "be direct" is also an on-record strategy with redressive action belonging to negative politeness. As Bianca Del Villano notes,

> NP [negative politeness] on-record strategies resembling the bald on-record approach may paradoxically be used in both unconventional and very formal situations with different func-

agueness and *ambiguity* are two paradigmatic mechanisms that have cognitive effects and that […], when they are consciously used, allow the speakers to be *euphemistic*" (2018, p. 80).

> tions. While on the one hand "there is an element in formal politeness that sometimes directs one to minimize the imposition by coming rapidly to the point, avoiding the further imposition of prolixity and obscurity" (Brown and Levinson 1987, p. 131), on the other hand bald on-record utterances are made by speakers who are not afraid to seem impolite. This requires an analysis of the individual, specific implicatures produced in the exchange. (2018, p. 36)

Since the very beginning of the play, Caratach prefers being direct with his cousin Bonduca. His orthophemistic interaction with the Iceni queen, far from being formally polite, indicates that the man is "not afraid to seem impolite" (Del Villano, 2018, p. 36) towards his queen.

All the considerations dealt with so far have focused on the speaker's intentions and attitudes, without taking the hearer into account. As Marina Terkourafi has pointed out, "(im)politeness [...] threatens the addressee's face [...] but no face-threatening intention is attributed to the speaker by the hearer" (2008, p. 70). However, in conversation the speaker's and hearer's roles are exchanged, the speaker becoming the hearer and vice versa; hence, turn takings indicate an exchange of conversational roles: "When confronted with one of these strategies, the hearer can remain silent or react by choosing to do an FTA in turn (thus producing an offensive-offensive pair), or reject the initial threat (producing an offensive-defensive pair)" (Del Villano, 2018, p. 37). For the purposes of this article, both the speaker's and hearer's points of view are important and will be considered. For example, orthophemisms/straight talk can be perceived as offensive by some hearers, thus being understood as impolite, instead of polite, as shown in Allan and Burridge's model. This is particularly evident in *Bonduca*, where straight talk is often perceived as impolite.

The integration of Allan and Burridge's X-phemism model and the face-based (im)politeness models discussed thus far can be summarised in the figure below (Figure 2):

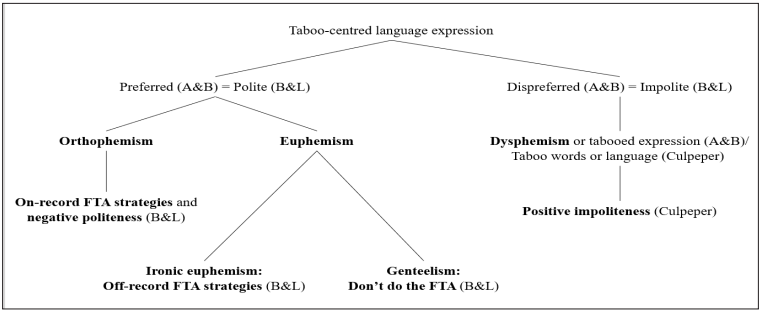

Fig. 2: X-phemism face-based model

Lastly, Allan and Burridge define X-phemisms as cross-varietal synonyms, meaning that "different varieties of a language use different terms, with the same or substantially the same denotation" (2006, p. 47). I would also define X-phemisms as cross-contextual, to fit into a pragmalinguistic face-based model. In fact, pragmatic studies the language in context and, as Culpeper states, taboo and impolite language are "sensitive to local context" (2018, p. 28).

3. Analysis

This section analyses some of the conversational exchanges in Fletcher's *Bonduca* following the model illustrated above. The taboo topics highlighted in the first section are examined through the lens of taboo language (i.e., through the X-phemism face-based model described above) to shed some light on the complex linguistic intricacies that characterise the idiolect of the Fletcherian *dramatis personae*.

3.1 Caratach and Bonduca: The taming of the queen

As noted above, Caratach, though socially inferior to his cousin Bonduca, queen of the Iceni, is not afraid of sounding rude and of showing directness and a certain power over the eponymous woman warrior from the very beginning of the play:

> BONDUCA
> And a woman,
> A woman beat 'em, Nennius; a weak woman,
> A woman, beat these Romans!
> CARATACH
> So it seems;
> A man would shame to talk so.
> [...]
> BONDUCA
> Cousin, do you grieve my fortunes?
> CARATACH
> No. Bonduca;
> If I grieve, 'tis the bearing of your fortunes:
> You put too much wind to your sail. (1.1.15–21)

Here Caratach's orthophemistic style is evident. As discussed previously, orthophemisms can be associated with both on-record FTA strategies, thus highlighting that the speaker is not afraid to seem impolite, and negative politeness, which aims at maintaining "the distance between S[peaker] and H[earer]" (Del Villano, 2018, p. 35). On the one hand, Caratach's utterance that "a man would shame to talk so" – i.e., a man would shame to talk about being beaten by a woman – is an intended FTA towards Bonduca. Yet, on the other hand, his calling her by name ("No. Bonduca"), thus avoiding returning the familiarity she had displayed towards him ("Cousin, do you grieve my fortunes?)", indicates a clear use of negative politeness by the Briton general. A few lines later, Bonduca addresses Caratach as "my valiant cousin" (1.1.32), while Caratach starts his

turn-taking component again with "No, Bonduca" (1.1.34). Distance is one of the parameters Brown and Levinson consider when measuring the weight of any face-threatening? x (W_x). The equation deriving from combining distance with the other parameters is

$$W_x = P(S, H) + D(S, H) + R_x,$$

where "D [distance] accounts for the interpersonal intimacy between S and H, P [relative power] for the possible power asymmetry between S and H that might affect their choice of FTA or redressive strategy, and R [rank] for the degree of external social imposition on S/H" (Del Villano, 2018, p. 38). The fact that Bonduca shows intimacy with Caratach, while he prefers distance, increases the weight of Caratach's FTA. Nevertheless, when considering the relative power – i.e., "the degree to which the speaker can impose their will on the hearer" (Brown and Levinson, 1987, p. 74) – and the ranking of imposition – i.e., "the right of the speaker to perform the act" (p. 74) – one might wonder why Bonduca, a queen, is so submissive towards a general of her army as to conclude, by the end of the first scene:

> No more; I see myself. Thou hast made me, cousin,
> More than my fortunes durst, for they abused me,
> And wound me up so high, I swell'd with glory:
> Thy temperance has cured that tympany,
> And given me health again, nay, more, discretion.
> Shall we have peace? for now I love these Romans. […]
> As thou hast nobly spoken, shall be done; […]
> The Romans shall have worthy wars. (1.1.145–177)

First of all, it is interesting to note the use of the deictic "thou" to show solidarity and intimacy between cousins, while Bonduca had previously addressed Caratach with "you", which is much more

common in early modern plays among "characters of the [...] highest ranks" (Walker, 2007, p. 234) to show formality, respect and admiration. Bonduca's transgression of the T/Y pronoun distinction is one of the main linguistic elements to be considered in understanding the conversational power balance between Bonduca and Caratach.[12] By displaying so much intimacy with her cousin, who is however her subordinate, the queen of the Iceni is dangerously mixing the public/political and private spheres. After all, she is a woman, and early modern English women were not supposed to interfere with the public sphere, as will be seen later. This error of judgement, which conversely is not made by Caratach, who constantly addresses his queen by the convenient address pronoun "you", eventually costs Bonduca her life. As a matter of fact, had she not listened to Caratach's request for "worthy wars" – i.e., fighting with honour – against the Romans, she might have led her army to victory, exactly as she declares to have done thus far until Caratach's intervention(s). Ultimately, by addressing her cousin by using "thou" and admitting that he "has cured that tympany", Bonduca is already abdicating her power and prefiguring her suicide. She is transferring her decisional powers to Caratach, whose choices in terms of military tactics lead to the Britons' defeat, as also noted by Ronald J. Boling (1999, p. 404): "Fletcher [...] does not privilege Caratach's manly virtues, but rather depicts the warrior as an obsessive crackpot who repeatedly impedes the British cause and spoils dramatic effect".

[12] According to Del Villano (2018, p. 84), "Y/T variables [...] are [...] involved in the analysis of (im)politeness and in the distinction between *discernment politeness*, understood as formulaic conventional courtesy, and *strategic politeness*, understood as a means of persuading others, causing offence and minimising possible imposition by and on others" (Emphasis in the original). While Caratach adopts the "you" as strategic politeness, Bonduca's inappropriate alternation between "you" and "thou", as seen later, marks (un)discernment politeness.

Bonduca's amenable behaviour towards her cousin may be directly connected with the taboo of powerful women onstage. Caratach, who represents King James and his misogynistic views according to Sharon Macdonald (1988, pp. 49–50), is justified in his orthophemisms and FTAs because during the Jacobean era the representation of Boadicea – who "invites the audience to ⌜be⌝ compare⌜d⌝ to Elizabeth I" (Neil, 2014, p. 91) – was somehow softened and domesticated "into powerlessness" (Crawford, 1999, p. 359). According to Sarah E. Johnson, Bonduca represents pride, a feminine sinful attitude[13] requiring punishment, according to the early modern English imagination (2017, p. 85). Both Caratach and the Roman general Suetonius insult the queen by calling her "proud woman" more than once in the play, thus exhibiting a dysphemistic attitude towards her by using this taboo expression. Moreover, in early modern England pride was also synonymous with sexual desire and – even more interestingly for our present purpose – "misunderstand⌜ing⌝ your place in relation to others, to exceed your limits" (Johnson, 2017, p. 85). This connotation of pride reinforces the taboo of powerful women onstage who do not understand their misplacement within the masculine military world of Fletcher's *Bonduca*. However, linguistically speaking the queen is well aware of her place within the society in which she lives, as shown in her avoidance of FTAs when dialoguing with her cousin. In other words, in the macho-oriented Jacobean world of this play, only Caratach manages to make Bonduca understand her rightful social place.

[13] Nevertheless, Bonduca's daughters call the Romans "proud improvident fools" (3.5.43) in the play, probably not alluding to any gender-oriented form of insult. Compare the use of "proud strangers" in Shakespeare *et al.*'s *Sir Thomas More* 1.1.61 uttered by a woman, Doll Williamson, towards Francis de Barde, the Lombard who wanted to kidnap her.

The apex of this conception is reached in the last scene, in which the two speak with each other prior to Bonduca's suicide, when Caratach's orthophemistic style is reinforced by dysphemistic insults towards the submissive queen and when he explicitly tells her, as her daughters before her,[14] to go home and spin. Yet, unlike in 1.1, this time the reader/audience has proof that, when Caratach is not around, Bonduca is anything but amenable and submissive.[15] In 3.5, Caratach scolds his cousin for giving wrong orders to her people:

> CARATACH
> Charge 'em i' th' flanks! Oh, you have play'd the fool,
> The fool extremely, the mad fool!
> BONDUCA
> Why, cousin?
> CARATACH
> The woman fool! Why did you give the word
> Unto the carts to charge down, and our people,
> In gross before the enemy? We pay for't.;
> Our own swords cut our throats! Why, pox on't!
> Why do you offer to command? The devil,
> The devil and his dam too! who bid you
> Meddle in men's affairs?
> BONDUCA
> I'll help all.
> Exeunt all but Caratach.
> CARATACH
> Home,
> Home and spin, woman, spin, go spin! you trifle. [...]
> O woman, scurvie woman, beastly woman. (3.5.125–138)

[14] "Learn to spin / And curse your knotted hemp!" (3.5.83–84).

[15] Cf. 2.3 when she orders Nennius to hang Judas and his four companions. Actually, Bonduca's apparently inexplicable submissive behaviour towards her cousin might even suggest that the queen is in love with Caratach, although no critical attention seems to have been devoted to this issue.

Clearly, Caratach exhibits negative politeness in distancing himself from Bonduca: not only does he continue to address her only by the deictic "you" which notoriously shows non-solidarity, but also through the generalising hypernym "woman", thus highlighting that all women, even queens, must not "meddle in men's affairs". On the contrary, Bonduca still calls him "cousin". The change of epithets that Caratach employs to address Bonduca (Acts 1 and 2: Bonduca and lady; Act 3: woman) shows the increasing distance that the general exhibits towards the Iceni queen and the depersonalization he is implementing on her persona in shifting from the hyponym Bonduca to the hypernym woman.

Yet in this scene Caratach's language is studded with dysphemisms, which highlight his ability to use both negative politeness and positive impoliteness strategies. Indeed, Caratach insults Bonduca by associating her four times with fools (decidedly not professional ones or jesters)[16] and with the devil, probably alluding to witches, "wom⌊e⌋n commanded by the devil" (Crawford, 1999, p. 363), whom King James particularly hated and feared. Moreover, the general strengthens his misogynistic outburst by defining Bonduca as a "trifle", i.e., something of little value in a male military world. She is supposed to leave the battlefield and return to "a domestic, private sphere" (p. 363), the proper place for women in the early modern imagination. Lastly, taboo language is conveyed through the two adjectives "scurvie" and "beastly", which pre-modify, respectively, the second and third element of the triad in verse 138. The effect of the adjectives, combined with the rule of the three, is to amplify the dysphemistic style of Caratach's insults. Not only is Bonduca a woman – and as such she is out of the sphere to which she is entitled – but

[16] For a thorough analysis of the relationship between the character of the fool and mental diseases/disabilities in early modern England, see Equestri, 2019.

she is also a scurvy creature – i.e., "worthless or contemptible" (*OED*, adj.) – and a beastly being – i.e., "cruel and unrestrained" (*OED*, adj. 2). A woman with despicable and irrational/animalistic behaviours is more than a male officer can accept in the military arena. Therefore, exactly as her daughters before her, Bonduca must go home, even though she is a queen – albeit one who has already metaphorically abdicated, as seen above.

Caratach's initial monologue in 5.1, immediately after Bonduca and her daughters commit suicide, although stylistically less dysphemistic than 3.5, still mirrors the same considerations towards the queen, who is not spared even in death:

> Thus we afflicted Britons climb for safeties,
> And, to avoid our dangers, seek destructions;
> Thus we awake to sorrows.—Oh, thou woman,
> Thou agent for adversities, what curses
> This day belong to thy improvidence!
> To Britanie, by thy means, what sad millions
> Of widows' weeping eyes! The strong man's valour
> Thou hast betrayed to fury, the child's fortune
> To fear, and want of friends; [...]:
> The virgins thou hast robb'd of all their wishes,
> Blasted their blowing hopes, turned their songs,
> Their mirthful marriage-songs, to funerals;
> The land thou hast left a wilderness of wretches. (5.1.1–17)

Here Caratach calls Bonduca "woman" again, but he abandons the pronoun "you" in favour of "thou" – i.e., he abandons strategic deferential politeness. The use of "thou" is far from indicating a renewed intimacy between the cousins: this time she is "thou" because she is no longer his queen, but a mere (dead) woman. No one is superior to Caratach; now that both the Queen and the princesses have died, he is the highest-ranking individual among the Britons. I do not want to assert that Caratach is a Machiavellian, Iago-like character, as he probably lacks Iago's

euphemistic style and mitigation strategies (see, i.e., Toddington, 2008; Petrina, 2019), but probably Caratach is revealed here as a purely malicious character. Not only does he employ what Culpeper lists as the fourth strategy of negative impoliteness (1996, p. 358: "*Explicitly associate the other with a negative aspect* – personalize, use the pronouns 'I' and 'You'"), thus charging Bonduca with the Britons' defeat, but he also addresses his FTAs to an interlocutor who cannot even rebut, as if he were pronouncing her *damnatio memoriae*.

Nevertheless, in Caratach's defence, his Y/T switch, FTAs and negative impoliteness might be directly connected to the taboo topic of suicide. The queen is accused of improvidence, fury and robbery vis-a-vis warfare and military command, but at the same time Caratach rails against her extremely selfish act. By committing suicide, Bonduca has "avoided [...] dangers", thus confirming a connection between suicide and selfishness that has received attention in particular by Shakespearean critics (see Langley, 2009). Even if, following Neil's observations (2014, p. 98), one takes into account the plot time (1st century CE) instead of the author time[17] and considers suicide not as a taboo but as "an ethical dilemma" (p. 98), the play still "encourages the audience to value Bonduca's suicide more than Caratach's surrender" (p. 99), given the taboo evaluation of self-killing in the early 1600s. As a suicide, Bonduca is a *felo de se* and considered a criminal by her early modern audience, her action surpassing in severity Caratach's cowardly and self-interested behaviour. When Caratach delivers his initial monologue in 5.1, the audience is not focused on the fact that Bonduca failed be-

[17] Nevertheless, given that Bonduca's suicide is a purely Fletcherian invention, unsupported by the play's sources, the queen's self-poisoning should be evaluated according to early modern parameters.

cause she listened to his advice, but on her taboo criminal act, which he underlines by negative impoliteness.

3.2. Bonvica and the Elder Sister: Love's Labour's Deceit

Bonduca is not the only female character on which Caratach exerts his linguistic power: the two daughters too seem powerless before him, albeit ruthless towards their enemies. In 3.5, the youngest daughter, Bonvica, captures her suitor Junius and other Roman soldiers by using deception, as she had already planned in 2.3.[18]

> 2 DAUGHTER
> Which is kind Junius?
> SERVANT
> This.
> 2 DAUGHTER
> Are you my sweetheart?
> It looks ill on't! How long is't, pretty soul,
> Since you and I first loved? Had we not reason
> To dote extremely upon one another?
> How does my love? This is not he; my chicken
> Could prate finely, sing a love-song.
> JUNIUS
> Monster—
> 2 DAUGHTER
> Oh, now it courts!
> JUNIUS
> Arm'd with more malice
> Than he that got thee has, the devil.

[18] "In love with me? that love shall cost your lives all.— / Come, sister, and advise me; I have here / A way to make an easy conquest of 'em, / If fortune favour me" (2.3.113–115).

2 DAUGHTER
[…] Ye damn'd lechers,
Ye proud improvident fools, have we now caught ye?
Are ye i' th' noose? Since ye are such loving creatures,
We'll be your Cupids: Do ye see these arrows?
We'll send 'em to your wanton livers, goats.
1 DAUGHTER
Oh, how I'll trample on your hearts, ye villains,
Ambitious salt-itch'd slaves, Rome's master-sins!
The mountain-rams tupped your hot mothers.
2 DAUGHTER
Dogs,
To whose brave founders a salt whore gave suck! […]
Enter CARATACH.
CARATACH.
Where,
Where are these ladies […] Sure these faces
I have beheld and known; they are Roman leaders!
How came they here?
2 DAUGHTER
A trick, sir, that we used
A certain policy conducted 'em
Unto our snare: We have done you no small service.
These used as we intend, we are for the battle.
CARATACH
As you intend? Taken by treachery?
1 DAUGHTER
Is't not allow'd?
CARATACH
Those that should gild our conquest,
Make up a battle worthy of our winning,
Catch'd up by craft?
2 DAUGHTER
By any means that's lawful.

CARATACH
A woman's wisdom in our triumphs? Out!
Out, [out,] ye sluts, ye follies! From our swords
Filch our revenges basely?—Arm again, gentlemen!—
Soldiers, I charge ye help 'em.
2 DAUGHTER
By Heaven, uncle,
We will have vengeance for our rapes!
CARATACH
By Heaven,
Ye should have kept your legs close then.—Dispatch there!
[…]
Bear off the women
Unto their mother!
2 DAUGHTER
One shot, gentle uncle!
CARATACH
One cut her fiddle-string!—Bear 'em off, I say.
1 DAUGHTER
The devil take this fortune!
CARATACH
Learn to spin,
Exeunt DAUGHTERS.
And curse your knotted hemp! (3.5.31–84)

Bonvica's ironic euphemistic style (what Brown and Levinson would call off-record FTA strategies) is revealed and reinforced by such adjective/determiner+noun collocations as "kind Junius", "my sweetheart", "pretty soul", "my love", which make her deliberately "sound unctuous and insincere" (Allan & Burridge, 1991, p. 159). Junius does understand her malicious euphemisms and replies with the dysphemistic insult "monster",[19] then asso-

[19] As Calder puts it, Junius's calling Bonvica a monster "signifies the unnatural way in which she is behaving: it is unwomanly to seize the

ciates her with the devil, as Caratach does later in the same scene in referring to Bonduca. Even Bonvica is associated with the devil, "he that got thee has", an association that sounds anachronistic, given the setting of the play in pre-Christian Roman Britain where, in druidic temples, the Queen and her daughters pray to pagan gods to defeat the invaders (3.1). As stated above, the three women's alluring powers attributed to their devilish craft characterise them as witches, an association the eldest daughter reinforces before leaving the stage when crying out "⌊t⌋he devil take this fortune!".[20] This alternation of ironic euphemisms and dysphemisms, as well as (im)politeness strategies, highlights the fact that love is a taboo topic in the play, insofar as the only possible way to deal with it is by off-record FTA strategies and insults.

After Junius's taboo words, Bonvica and her older sister rapidly change their conversational style, passing from ironic euphemisms to dysphemisms – i.e., from off-record FTA strategies to positive impoliteness and taboo words – while still replicating the adjective(s)+noun structure in their insults: "damn'd lechers", "proud improvident fools", "ambitious salt-ich'd slaves", "master-sins". Moreover, the Iceni princesses call the Romans "goats", "villains" and "dogs", thus reinforcing the animal imagery with the astounding sentence "⌊t⌋he mountain-rams tupped

language as she has, to display intelligence rather than emotion. Her rejection of Junius effaces her feminine identity and makes her monstruous, as Junius's love-struck behaviour damages his identity as a man" (1999, p. 223). This, I argue, reinforces the idea that love is a tabooed theme in *Bonduca*.

[20] Even Bonduca's final monologue seems to contain a self-accusation of witchcraft or hints at supernatural powers she may possess when, close to death, she utters: "Poor vanquish'd Romans, with what matchless tortures / Could I now rack ye! But I pity ye, / Desiring to die quiet" (4.4.147–149).

your hot mothers", essentially calling Roman mothers zoophilic whores. Love in any form is tabooed in *Bonduca*: it weakens and feminises men, be it platonic love or uncontrollable sexual desire (even zoophilic and necrophilic).

It is also interesting to note that, exactly as I have underlined when dealing with Caratach's insults towards Bonduca, even in this case the more dysphemistic one's conversational style becomes, the more generalising his/her insults grow. As seen above, Caratach's orthophemisms are addressed to the hyponym Bonduca, while dysphemisms are uttered to the hypernym woman, indicating that no woman should interfere with male affairs. Similarly, Bonvica saves ironic euphemisms for the hyponym Junius, whereas she dysphemistically insults all Romans. It is as if Fletcher uses the play's antithetical (Green, 1982) or parallel (Hickman, 1989) microcosm to discuss more general and thorny ideological issues[21] of gender, race and power, highlighting these questions through dysphemisms and taboo language that catch the reader/audience's eye. As seen above (and later in this article), such a process is reinforced by parallelisms that characterise the entire text (in this I agree more with Hickman than with Green). Replicating the same taboo words and structures (e.g., associating both Bonduca and her daughters with the devil in two different parts of the play, avoiding showing intimacy, etc.) helps the reader/audience understand unequivocally the macrocosmic "world picture" behind and beyond this play.

Speaking of parallelisms, when Caratach enters the stage, he understands that some Roman officers and soldiers have been "⌈c⌋atch'd up by craft". This is more than his male-warrior hon-

[21] On the topic of ideology, Green defines *Bonduca* as "⌈e⌋ssentially a drama of ideas" (1982, p. 305).

our can stand and it is signalled by the fact the orthophemistic style that has characterised his speeches thus far blends with aggressive taboo language. He calls Bonvica and her sister "sluts" and "follies", and he completely nullifies any association between rape and taboo by showing "little sympathy" (Frénée-Hutchins, 2013, p. 184): "2 DAUGHTER By Heaven, uncle, / We will have vengeance for our rapes! / CARATACH By Heaven, / Ye should have kept your legs close then". Here the Briton general also avoids reciprocating the intimacy Bonvica seeks to show by calling him "uncle", as he had done when her mother called him "cousin". On the other hand, by rhetorically asking "A woman's wisdom in our triumphs?" and by sending his nieces away as he does with their mother a few lines below ("Learn to spin, / And curse your knotted hemp!"), Caratach is emphasising the taboo topic of powerful women onstage, associating them with witchcraft by using the verb "curse". As when Caratach converses with Bonduca, his female counterparts are unable to overcome his conversational power and mastery of (im)politeness strategies. Bonvica and her sister are taken away and, when they re-enter the stage with their mother, they utter not a single word but let Caratach insult Bonduca, who is sent away to spin like her daughters before her.

4. Conclusion

The pragmalinguistic analysis carried out here has attempted to demonstrate that Fletcher's *Bonduca* is a play deeply imbued with taboo language. Taboo themes mainly concern the three Briton women and the consideration (or rather "discrimination," according to Hickman, 1989) they receive in the male military world the play portrays. Such taboo topics as suicide, love and the representation of powerful women are reinforced by taboo words and strategies of (im)politeness, orthophemisms and dys-

phemisms by one male character in particular, Caratach, frequently considered King James's alter ego by scholars (i.a., Macdonald, 1988, pp. 49–50; Jowitt, 2003, p. 477; Frénée-Hutchins, 2013, p. 183). This article has illustrated the differences between men and women in terms of conversational power and strategies. Jowitt's statement that "Caratach and Bonduca have antithetical styles of leadership" (2003, p. 475) is evinced when FTA strategies and (im)politeness are considered and applied to the analysis of their turn takings. Caratach is a better leader than Bonduca because he does not mix public and private spheres, i.e., his role as a Briton general and his being the queen's cousin. Therefore, Bonduca is "overshadowed by her cousin in dramatic" (Lovascio, 2020, p. 174) but also in linguistic terms, I would argue, exactly as in the case of princess Bonvica and her older sister.

As is evident from the conversation analysis I have carried out, female characters are defeated not only because they commit suicide at the end of the fourth act, thus leaving the stage to an all-male fifth act, but because they are inferior to Caratach from a pragmatic perspective. Caratach, on the other hand, masters both orthophemistic and dysphemistic (im)polite styles, avoiding useless euphemisms and preferring to talk straight and sharply when necessary to emphasise his power over Bonduca and her daughters. Ultimately, Caratach's conversational power is confirmed by the fact that he is the only Briton who survives the war. When he surrenders to Suetonius's army, Caratach "yield[s] then / Not to [his] blows, but [his] brave courtesies" (5.3.187–188), probably meaning that he is impressed by the Romans' politeness and hence has found in Rome the right place to live, or perhaps the risk of being killed like his nephew Hengo forces him to exchange politeness with strategic politeness, given the new and dangerous context he now finds himself living in.

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"Has marriage cured thee of whoring": Impoliteness and taboo matters in Wycherley's The Country Wife

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List of Abbreviations

A	Act
FCT	Face Constituting Theory
FTA	Face Threatening Act
H	Hearer
JM	Jocular Mockery
NI1	Frighten
NI2	Condescend, scorn, ridicule
NI3	Invade the other's space
OFF-R	Off-Record
ON-R	On-Record
P	Relative power
P1	Notice, attend to H (his interests, wants, needs, goods)
P2	Exaggerate
P3	Intensify interest to H
P10	Offer, promise
P12	Include both H and S in the activity
P13	Give (or ask for) reasons
PI3	Dissociate from the others
S	Speaker
T	Teasing

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1. Introduction

The present study aims to explore the im/politeness strategies employed by William Wycherley in *The Country Wife* (1675) in excerpts concerning taboo matters related to sexuality, physical deformity and gender discrimination.

The essay is organized into two main sections. The first section illustrates the methodology: it presents the concept of 'face' as theorized from the 1960s onwards; Brown and Levinson's as well as Culpeper's pivotal super-strategies; and Haugh's recent research about teasing and jocular mockery. The second section investigates dysphemism in the comedy. In the final considerations, I remark that approaching the dramatical text from a pragmatic perspective sheds new light on Wycherley's impudent style, as it is successfully displayed in his masterpiece to finely expose "the extremes of human follies and vices hidden behind the mask of false motives or feigned appearances" (Kachur, 2004, pp. 139–140).

2. Methodology

It is widely recognized that Erving Goffman filled a void in the linguistic domain, by addressing the concept of "face" for the first time. Indeed, his definition was fated to influence the studies that were published in the pragmatic domain from the late 1960s onwards:

> The term *face* may be defined as the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he had taken during a particular contact. Face is an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes–albeit an image that others may share [...]. One's own face and the face of others are constructs of the same order [...]. At such times the person's face clearly is something that is not lodged in or on his body, but rather something that is diffusely located in the flow of events in the encounter and becomes manifest only when these

> events are read and interpreted for the appraisals expressed in them. (Goffman, 1967, p. 5, 7; emphasis in the original)

Based on these premises, Goffman considered face as a public self-display that activated and assumed a certain shape in the presence of an observer, having an equal concern for others' face at the same time. Such conception was later refined by Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson, who theorized a distinction between "negative face," that is "the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distraction"; and "positive face," namely "the positive consistent self-image of 'personality' (crucially including the desire that this self-image be appreciated and approved of) claimed by the interactants" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 61). Occasionally, conversation generates tension among speakers; words can be used as weapons to (significantly) alter the others' positive or negative face. Consequently, Brown and Levinson introduced the concept of Face-threatening Acts[1] (hereafter FTAs) together with a series of strategies based on politeness, that helped both speakers and hearers contain (and possibly neutralize) the risk of losing face:

> Do The FTA;[2]
> Don't Do The FTA;
> On Record: An actor goes on record in doing an act A if it is clear to participants what communicative intention led the actor to do A;

[1] "[…] it is intuitively the case that certain kinds of acts intrinsically threaten face, namely those acts that by their nature run contrary to the face wants of the addressee and/or of the speaker. By 'act' we have in mind what is intended to be done by a verbal or non-verbal communication, just as one or more 'speech acts' can be assigned to an utterance" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 65).

[2] The List of Abbreviations has been provided at the beginning of this chapter.

> Off Record: if an actor goes off record in doing A, then there is more than one unambiguously attributable intention so that the actor cannot be held to have committed himself to one particular intent;
> Positive Politeness: in positive politeness the sphere of redress is widened to the appreciation of alter's wants in general or to the expression of similarity between ego's and alter's wants;
> Negative Politeness: all forms useful in general for social 'distancing'. (Brown & Levinson, 1987, pp. 68–69)

Moreover, considering politeness as a socially constructed phenomenon, they introduced the following variables:

> Social Distance between S and H: the degree of familiarity and solidarity they share;
> Relative Power of S and H: the degree to which the speaker can impose their will on the hearer;
> Ranking of Imposition Attached to the Speech Act in the Culture: the degree of expenditure of goods and services by the hearer; the right of the speaker to perform the act; and the degree to which the hearer welcomes the imposition. (p. 74)

Nevertheless, despite their fine effort to forge "some universals in language usage", both the face-based models and politeness strategies so conceived were severely criticized by other scholars for several reasons. For instance, some contemporary studies underline the fact that "because social selves emerge in relationships with other social selves, face is an emergent property of relationship, and therefore a relational phenomenon" (Arundale, 2006, p. 201).[3] Another major development from Brown

[3] In line with it, Robert Arundale detached himself from the previous theory which, in some way, implied a dualistic conceptualization of face; alternatively, he illustrated the Face Constituting Theory (hereafter FCT) as follows: "[…] Face Constituting Theory offers the dialectic of connectedness and

and Levinson's approach was instigated by Jonathan Culpeper.[4] He postulated a framework that is "opposite in terms of orientation to face. Instead of enhancing or supporting face, impo-

separateness as a culture-general re-conceptualization of Brown and Levinson's (1987) dualism of positive and negative face. Connectedness in human relating encompasses positive face understood not just in terms of having one's wants approved by others, but also in terms of a wide array of culture-specific interpreting of how persons might situate themselves as integrated […] with respect to one another in face-to-face encounters. […] Separateness encompasses negative face understood not just in terms of being unimpeded in one's actions, but also in terms of a broad range of culture-specific interpretings of how persons might situate themselves as differentiated […] with respect to one another. […] *face is one's conjointly co-constituted operative interpreting of both connection with and separation from one another in sequential inter-action*" (Arundale, 2020, p. 278; emphasis in the original). Therefore, FCT emphasizes the mutual engagement that inevitably qualifies both the speakers and the hearers' face "as-both-connected-to-and-separate-from-one-another" (p. 280). Before finding extensive space in Arundale's above mentioned monograph (2020; particularly pertinent is chapter 8), FCT was previously treated by the author in the essay "An alternative model and ideology of communication for an alternative to politeness theory" (1998) and also presented during a conference held at the National Communication Association in 2004.

[4] "Brown and Levinson's model is about the *speaker* selecting strategies to achieve particular goals. The role of the hearer or target interacting with the speaker is barely mentioned. […] The thrust of Brown and Levinson's work is the traditional one of proposing a model and then testing its predictions against the data. It is not to derive empirically the model from the data, though clearly the data must have informed numerous aspects of the model. To be fair, every output strategy from their model is illustrated, but that does not necessarily mean that it is routine, which is purported to be part of their understanding of a strategy. And even if it is routine, we do not know the extent to which it is, the extent to which knowledge of that strategy is shared. Are some strategies frequent and well known, and others less so? What exactly is understood by the strategy and in what context?" (Culpeper, 2015, p. 424).

liteness super-strategies are a means of attacking" (Culpeper, 1996, p. 356), and it is outlined as follows:

> Bald-On-Record Impoliteness: the FTA is performed in a direct, clear, unambiguous and concise way in circumstances where face is not irrelevant or minimized.
> Positive Impoliteness: the use of strategies designed to damage the addressee's positive face wants, [...]
> Negative Impoliteness: the use of strategies designed to damage the addressee's negative face wants, [...]
> Off-Record Impoliteness: the FTA is performed by means of an implicature but in such a way that one attributable intention clearly outweighs any others.
> Withhold Politeness: the absence of politeness work where it would be expected. (p. 352)

Furthermore, he also provided a definition of mock impoliteness: "impoliteness that remains on the surface, since it is understood that it is not intended to cause offence" (Culpeper, 2011, p. 352).[5]

Mockery found extensive space in Michael Haugh's research (2012, pp. 1099–1114; 2016, pp. 120–136; 2017, pp. 204–215; see also Culpeper & Haugh, 2014, p. 126; Culpeper, Haugh, & Sinkeviciute, 2017, pp. 323–350). As far as this pragmatic device is concerned, Haugh (2010, p. 2017) argues that

> [...] it is argued that such findings can be expanded upon by grounding the analysis of the complex connections between jocular mockery and relationship in Face Constituting Theory [...]. In particular, to explore the ways in which jocular mockery influences the participants' interpretings of their continually evolving relationship(s), [...] while jocular mockery may be evaluated as threatening to the relationship of those interac-

[5] The concept draws from Geoffrey Leech's definition of "mock impoliteness," seen as "an offensive way of being friendly" (1983, p. 144).

> tants, it can also be evaluated at the same time as supportive of their relationships.

The Australian scholar devoted several publications to this specific linguistic phenomenon and its various forms, with special reference to teasing[6] and jocular mockery: "(non-)verbal acts" (Haugh, 2010, p. 2108) that, when uttered, might be variously interpreted by the addressee – who may catch the actual meaning of the spoken words, therefore accepting the joke and laughing along, or take it as an offence or a threat towards his/her face.

For the most part, Haugh (see, among others, 2012) retraces the phenomena in colloquial and contemporary situations. The collected data led him to provide a solid definition of teasing and jocular mockery, as well as a reliable list of markers to detect them in a conversation:

> Teasing is generally understood to involve combining elements of (ostensible) provocation with (ostensible) non seriousness. It thus encompasses a heterogeneous class of phenomena [...] ranging from jocular mockery [...] to playful jousting [...], goading [...], and baiting [...], through sexual teases. [...] Jocular mockery is a form of teasing where speakers figuratively put down or diminish the target in some way, but do so within a non-serious or playful frame. These instances of mockery were construed as jocular through various cues to non-seriousness in the delivery of the mocking remark itself, and through laughing responses on the part of recipient. (Haugh, 2016, pp. 122–123. See also Haugh, 2010, p. 2106 *passim*; 2012, pp. 1105–1108; 2017, pp. 206–211)

[6] Haugh (2017, p. 205) specifies that "the systematic study of teasing and mockery largely has its roots in the work of anthropologists". It was indeed Alfred Radcliffe-Brown (1940, p. 195) to put 'joking relationships' at the center of the academic debate: "Joking relations are held to encompass 'a relation between two persons in which one is by custom permitted, and in some instances required, to tease or make fun of the other, who in turn required to take no offence'".

In the spirit of investigating instances of teasing, jocular mockery and im/politeness "longitudinally," (Haugh, 2017, p. 2015) the next section explores selected dialogues from William Wycherley's *The Country Wife*.

3. Analysis

3.1 Performing im/politeness, teasing and jocular mockery to expose Horner's impotence

As the curtain is raised, Horner has already sown the seeds of his plan – that is, spreading the news about his impotence – thanks to the complicity of the surgeon:

2	HORNER: [...] (*Aloud)* Well, my dear	
3	doctor, **hast thou done what I desired?**	**[P]**
4	QUACK: **I have undone you for ever with the women**, and reported you	**[NI2]**
5	throughout the whole town ***as* bad *as* an eunuch**, with as much trouble as if I had made you one in earnest. […]	**[NI2]**
10	I have told all the chambermaids, waiting-women, tire-women, and old women of my	
11	acquaintance; nay, and whispered it as a	
12	secret to 'em, and to the whisperers of Whitehall; so that you	
13	need not doubt 'twill spread, and **you will be *as* odious** to the	**[NI2]**
14	handsome young women, *as*—	
15	HORNER*: As* **the small-pox**. Well—	**[NI2]**
16	QUACK: And to the married women of this end of the town, *as*—	
17	HORNER: ***As* the great one**; nay, *as* their own husbands.	**[NI2]**

18	QUACK: And to the city dames, ***as aniseed Robin*, of filthy**	**[OFF-R]**
19	**and contemptible memory**; and **they will frighten their**	**[NI2]**
20	**children with your name, especially their females**.	
21	HORNER: **And cry, Horner's coming to carry you away**. I am	**[NI1] [NI2] [NI3]**
22	only afraid 'twill not be believed. You told 'em 'twas by **an English-French disaster**[7]	

Table 1: 1.1.2–22 (my emphasis)

By emphasizing his relative power towards the hearer, in lines 2–3 Horner asks the quack "hast thou done what I desired?" The latter is subjugated, as the former deliberately chooses the verb "to desire," to convey the idea that it is his duty to make the rake's wish come true. Negative impoliteness (hereafter NI) is the most recurrent strategy in the excerpt, and it is always addressed to Horner (ll. 4–5, 13, 19–20). It is worth underlying that the protagonist uses NI not to threaten someone else's face but his own. This is particularly evident in lines 14–15 and 16–17, where Horner abruptly interrupts the Quack and finishes his sentences, addressing injuries towards himself. Yet, in lines 19–21, he perfects the doctor's tale, by adding frightening details to the imaginary situation he is portraying: here, the "eunuch" is pictured as a monster that parents may evoke to scare children if they don't behave. Concerning the semantic features of the utterances that damage Horner's face, we notice that all the offences denigrate his physical condition; the recurring terms indicate rottenness ("undone"), pestilence ("small

[7] All quotes from the play are drawn from Wycherley (2014). The line numbers are provided between parentheses after quotes in the text.

pox") and sexual transmitted disease ("as the great one" = syphilis; filthy; contemptible; "an English-French disaster" = syphilis), often introduced by comparatives of equality ("as… as") to attenuate the degree of the offence. Moreover, line 18 – "*aniseed Robin*, of filthy and contemptible memory" – mentions a "well-known hermaphrodite who sold aniseed water," (Wycherley, 2014, p. 8, n. 18) to corroborate the idea of sexual disorders. Besides, the reference to sexual non-normativity may be considered off-record impoliteness, addressed to Horner's non-normal sexual equipment.

Sir Jaspar's entrance on stage shortly afterwards enriches the pragmatic dynamic that permeates the comedy. References to jocular mockery, teasing and positive politeness are detectable in the following exchange with the protagonist:

52	SIR JASPAR: [...] **I look upon as an occasional reprimand to me, *sir*,**	**[P1]**
53	**for not kissing your hands, *sir*, since your coming out of France,**	
54	***sir***; and so my disaster, *sir*, has been my good fortune, *sir*; **and this**	**[P12]**
55	**is my wife and sister, *sir***.	
56	HORNER: What then, ***sir***? [...]	**[JM]**
61	SIR JASPAR: [***Aside***] So, the report is true, I find, by his coldness or	
62	aversion to the sex; but **I'll play the wag with him**.—[*Aloud*.] **Pray**	**[T]**
63	**salute my wife**, my lady, *sir*.	**[P1]**
64	HORNER: **I will kiss no man's wife, *sir*, for him, *sir*; I have taken my**	**[PI3]**
65	**eternal leave, *sir*, of the sex already, *sir***.	
66	SIR JASPAR: [***Aside***] **Ha! ha! ha! I'll plague him yet**.—[*Aloud*.] **Not know my wife, *sir*?**	**[JM] [T] [P3]**

67	HORNER: I do know your wife, *sir*; she's a woman, *sir*, and	
68	consequently **a monster**, *sir*, **a greater monster** than a husband, *sir*.	**[NI2]**
69	SIR JASPAR: A husband! how, *sir*?	
70	HORNER: So, *sir*; but **I make no more cuckolds, *sir***. (*Makes horns*)	**[JM]**
71	SIR JASPAR: **Ha! ha! ha! Mercury! Mercury!** [...]	**[JM]**
83	**Ha! ha! ha!** he hates women perfectly, I find.	**[JM]**
91	[...] **Ha! ha! ha!** no, he can't wrong your ladyship's honour, upon	**[JM]**
92	my honour. He, **poor man**—hark you in your ear—**a mere eunuch**. [...]	**[NI2]**
98–99	I must away. Business must be preferred always before love and	
100	ceremony with the wise, Master Horner.	
101	HORNER: And the **impotent**, Sir Jaspar.	**[NI2]**
102	SIR JASPAR: Ay, ay, the **impotent**, Master Horner; **hah! hah! hah!**	**[JM]**
104	[...] He's an innocent man now, you know. Pray stay, I'll hasten	
105	the chairs to you.—Mr. Horner, **your servant**; **I should be glad**	**[P1] [P10]**
106	**to cards with my wife after dinner**; you are fit for women at that	**[P12]**
107	game yet, **ha! ha!**—[*Aside*] 'Tis as much a husband's prudence to	**[JM]**
108	provide innocent diversion for a wife as to hinder her unlawful	
109	pleasures; and he had better employ her than let her employ	
110	herself.—[*Aloud*] Farewell.	

Table 2: 1.1.52–56, 61–71, 83, 91–92, 98–104, 105–110 (my emphasis)

Sir Jaspar starts the conversation with a pretentious *mea culpa* (lines 52-54), asking Horner to forgive him for not paying respect sooner, being that the protagonist has been back from France for a while. He invites Horner to salute Lady Fidget and her sister with a conciliatory tone: a great endorsement towards the protagonist, a renowned rake in the City. To showcase exquisite courtesy, intensify interest towards the addressee and include him in a conversation with the ladies, Sir Jaspar recurs to Brown and Levinson's positive politeness – a strategy that he also employs in lines 63 and 105-108 – with the same goal: to attend to Horner in various ways, not least inviting him to dinner at his house. However, given that he starts teasing the protagonist in the following lines, I would not exclude that the pompous style he uses in lines 54-55 serves to perform a subtle FTA: knowing that Horner is suffering from impotence, inviting him to meet women may in a way expose his physical deficiency – without openly offending him, though – thus confirming rumors and damaging face at the same time.[8]

In response to such a 'gallant attack', Horner exploits jocular mockery: in line 56, not only does he display indifference towards Sir Jaspar's flamboyant *excusatio*, he also makes fun of him by mimicking his "nervous tic, over-using the term 'sir' until it, and the masculinity it implies, are bled of meaning" (Stern, 2014, p. xii). Indeed, the honorific "sir" serves the purpose of the "off-record markers" as theorized by Keltner et al. (2001, p. 234), namely it is "required to differentiate teases from criticisms". In so doing, he avoids quarrels or malcontent, preserving the humorous tone of the comedy.[9] Unaware that Horn-

[8] On teasing used to weaken masculine identity see, among others, Morgan (1996).

[9] As Butler (2007, p. 31) claims, "[t]easing also serves an entertainment function similar to humorous discourse in general".

er is indeed lying, Sir Jaspar decides to play along and tease the rake. From line 61 onwards, he conveys his utterances through two distinct channels: aside, to speak to himself and with the audience that is the privileged witness of this jocular fight, and aloud, addressed to the rake. "I'll play the wag with him" (1.1.62), he declares aside, teasing Horner immediately afterwards;[10] forcing him into a conversation with Lady Fidget and performing another FTA – analogous to the one detected in lines 54–55. Horner answers by dodging the attack, using positive impoliteness: in line 64, he dissociates himself from the proposed activity, declaring also that he has taken "eternal leave, *sir*, of the sex already, *sir*." Such a statement is received by Sir Jasper as a mocking response, as the post-utterance completion laughter particles *ha! ha! ha!* (1.1.66) indicate. Notwithstanding, he does not give up upon his strategy and keeps teasing Horner: "I'll plague him yet," he says aside; "Not know my wife, sir?" (1.1.66), he goes aloud, performing another FTA by recurring to positive politeness. As a result, Horner decides to scorn both the speaker (indirectly) and the ladies (directly), using negative impoliteness this time: "I do know your wife, *sir*; she's a woman, *sir*, and consequently a monster, *sir*, a greater monster than a husband, *sir*" (1.1.67-68). Such strategy marks a climactic moment in the excerpt, as the offence is delivered unmistakably. The counter-attack succeeds. In fact, Sir Jaspar seems disoriented: "A husband! how, *sir*?" (1.1.69). Nonetheless, Horner decides to give up impo-

[10] "Examining the teases themselves reveals a strong basis for their recognizability, which is that they are built in various ways to signal or make it very obvious that they are humorous and NOT, for example, sincere proposals. This is usually achieved through the selection of some lexical item(s) in the tease [...] Some other teases likewise contain or propose an exaggerated version through the more *formulaic* character of the whole turn" (Drew, 1987, p. 231; emphasis in the original).

liteness immediately; he redirects conversation towards jocular mockery, therefore restoring a light-hearted, comic mood. Moreover, he reassures the hearer by saying: "I make no more cuckolds" (1.1.70), corroborating his good intentions with non-verbal cues ("*makes horns*"). The messages are hilariously interpreted by the addressee, who supports mockery by laughing loud (1.1.71, 83, 91, 102).

Further confirmation of the fact that Horner is now joking, therefore not taking/delivering any offence, is detectable in lines 98-101. By refining Sir Jaspar's statement, "Business must be preferred always before love and ceremony with the wise" with the addition of "And the impotent," he exploits the same strategy performed in lines 19–21, using negative impoliteness towards himself – to underline his erectile dysfunction, in the present case. The strategy proves to be successful for two reasons: first, because Sir Jaspar accommodates the utterance as jocular mockery and laughs in reaction, hence preserving the merry mood of the scene; and then, because he definitively believes in Horner's impotence, he is sure that his dear friend could never make a cuckold of him: "you are fit for women at that game yet, [...] (*Aside*) 'Tis as much a husband's prudence to provide an innocent diversion for a wife as to hinder her unlawful pleasures; and he had better employ her than let her employ herself" (1.1.107–110). Thus, we witness an interesting twist of events, partially explained aside: from being considered a cuckolder – that is a serious threat for married men – Horner becomes the perfect ally of husbands and an ideal company for wives, since he can entertain without satisfying any sexual desire, thus preserving men's virility, women's reputation and their marital stability. Sir Jaspar's agreeableness towards Horner is finally sealed with a polite invitation before exiting: "I should be glad to see you at my house. Pray come and dine with me, and play at cards with my wife after dinner" (1.1.105–107).

As far as semantics are concerned, the excerpt analyzed so far (1.1.52–110) displays an overall coherence with the previous one (1.1.2–22). As a matter of fact, we can count several terms related to sexuality as well as disease and physical decay (i.e., "plague," "cuckold," "eunuch," and "impotent"). Particularly relevant is, in my opinion, the reference to Mercury in line 71, as it allows a dual reading: on the one hand, it refers to the chemical substance "used to treat venereal disease" (Wycherley, 2014, p. 10, n. 70); on the other one, it is an explicit recall to the Greek god who, according to classic mythology, protected – among others – travellers, traders and thieves; he was also associated with both speed and guidance of soul; but, above all, Mercury was a messenger. Such peculiar references exalt the sexual matrix that is at the base of the comedy because they can allude to the trade of bodies engaged in extra-conjugal relationships, as much as to sexually transmitted infections that travel fast from a body to another.

3.2 Cuckolding as FTA

Throughout the play, the relationship between Horner and Pinchwife is fraught, with the former directing several FTAs to the latter – who configures as his antagonist. Being informed of Horner's notorious licentiousness and wary of becoming a cuckold, Pinchwife decides to marry a country lady and live happily ever after, far from London and the frivolous entertainment that may affect his pure spouse.[11] Coincidentally, the couple is urged to spend some days in the city; during a night at the the-

[11] "Marjorie [*sic*] comes to London with a mind so unformed as to seem almost innocent. Her unaffected simplicity andunconcern with all the worldly mechanic of honor make her immediately attractive. She is […] uninitiated into virtue, whose natural curiosity and healthy passions are thwarted by Pinchwife's jealous temper" (Morris, 1972, p. 4).

atre, the rake gets to lay eyes upon Margery – the titular country wife. Allegedly, he is struck by her grace and is resolute to seduce her. His goal is made explicit in his first conversation with Pinchwife on stage:

313	PINCHWIFE: Gentlemen, **your humble servant**.	**[P1]**
314	HORNER: Well, Jack, by thy long absence from the town, the grumness of	
315	thy countenance, and the slovenliness of thy habit, **I should give thee joy, should**	**[NI3]**
316	**I not, of marriage?**	
317	PINCHWIFE: [*Aside.*] Death! does he know I'm married too? I thought to have	
318	concealed it from him at least. […]	
324	HORNER: **I heard thou were married**.	**[NI3]**
325	PINCHWIFE: What then?	
326	HORNER: Why, **the next thing that is to be heard, is, thou'rt a cuckold**.	**[ON-R] [NI2]**
327	PINCHWIFE: [*Aside*] Insupportable name!	
328–329	HORNER: But **I did not expect marriage from such a whoremaster as you**; one that knew the town so much, and women so well.	**[ON-R] [NI2]**
330	PINCHWIFE: Why, I have married no London wife. […]	
408	HORNER: So, then **you only married to keep a whore to yourself**. […]	**[ON-R] [NI2]**
410	Therefore	
411	I'd advise my friends to keep rather than marry, since too I	
412–413	find, by your example, it does not serve one's turn; **for I saw you yesterday in the eighteen-penny place with a pretty country-wench**.	**[NI3]**

414–415	PINCHWIFE: ⌈*Aside*⌉ How the devil! did he see my wife then? I sat there that she might not be seen. But she shall never go to a play again. ⌈…⌉	
424	HORNER: But prithee, was it thy wife? She was exceedingly pretty:	
425	***I was in love with her at that distance.***	**⌈OFF-R⌉**

Table 3: 1.1.313–318, 324–330, 408, 410–415, 424–425 (my emphasis)

Although Pinchwife starts the conversation by paying respect to the gentlemen on sight (1.1.313), his positive politeness is ignored by the "eunuch", who immediately strikes him with a question meant to inquire into his presumed marriage (1.1.314–316). Such curiosity is then corroborated by the persistent use of negative impoliteness. Indeed, Horner decides to go brutally on-record either invading Pinchwife's personal space – by asking questions on private matters or insulting his past (sexual) habits and his matrimony. Moreover, in lines 315–316, 324, 326, 412–413 and 424, it is possible to detect some FTAs towards the newlywed, meant to jeopardize his social status. Several offences are delivered on-record, with Horner using swearwords that recall illegitimate relationships with no hesitation: "cuckold," "whore" and "whoremaster". As for the lexicon related to extra-conjugal activities, the term "cuckold" is particularly relevant here,[12] as it cherishes Horner's most powerful linguistic weapon, the key to accomplish a mission.

[12] For an exhaustive study about the staging of cuckoldry during Restauration, see Corcoran (2012, pp. 543–559).

Wycherley depicts Pinchwife as extremely apprehensive about his public image.[13] To avoid scandals of any sort, he plans to marry Margery not for her peculiarities, but because she was born and raised in the country – consequently, she ignored the variety of (morally debatable) experiences women could have in London. He preserves secrecy about this union and forbids his wife from living the city life, as he fears she would easily fall prey to the sexual predators that inhabit it. Indeed, the idea of becoming a cuckold suffices to let him sink into despair. Horner recognizes his antagonist's weakness and exploits it by exhaustingly threatening his face. So, cuckolding configures as the quintessential FTA of *The Country Wife*.[14] Horner expertly deploys it to reach his goal: to enjoy the company of (married) women.[15] The strategy indeed succeeds, the rake will win Margery's heart and body, condemning Pinchwife to public humiliation:

> PINCHWIFE
> [*Aside.*] O Heavens! what do I suffer? Now 'tis too plain he knows her, and yet—
> HORNER
> And this, and this—[*Kisses her again.*
> MRS. PINCHWIFE
> What do you kiss me for? I am no woman.

[13] "Mr. Pinchwife is at the most obvious level a caricature of the dull, heavy, and constrained Puritanism" (Knapp, 2000, p. 456).

[14] According to Gelineau (2014, p. 278), "[i]n a truly Swiftian way, Wycherley forces the audience, or those of them who have the wits to see, to identify themselves with what is attacked. To communicate this scathing view of society, Wycherley finds the perfect metaphor in the image of the cuckold: [...] he shows a world where, like cuckolds, those who trust in meaning are almost always cheated".

[15] Anthony Kaufman (1975–6, p. 219) defines him "the last great seventeenth-century Don Juan".

> PINCHWIFE
> ⌈*Aside.*⌉ So, there, 'tis out.—⌈*Aloud.*⌉ Come, I cannot, nor will stay any longer. ⌈…⌉
> ⌈*Aside.*⌉ How! do I suffer this? Was I not accusing another just now for this rascally patience, in permitting his wife to be kissed before his face? Ten thousand ulcers gnaw away their lips.—⌈*Aloud.*⌉ Come, come. (3.2.424–426, 429–431)

3.3 On-Record Female Sexuality

In *The Country Wife*, the men on stage do not hesitate to remark on the ladies' peculiar looseness and venality; women are depicted as mercenaries "made constant and loyal by good pay rather than by oaths and covenants" (1.1.409–410). To provide an example, in the initial lines of the second act, Pinchwife describes the frivolous attitude that is typical of the spouses, "who only love their husbands and love every man else; love plays, visits, fine coaches, fine clothes, fiddles, balls, treats, and so lead a wicked town-life" (2.1.72–75). Horner declares repulsion for women, and he always gets the chance to denigrate them:

> SIR JASPAR
> Come, come, man; what, avoid the sweet society of womankind? that sweet, soft, gentle, tame, noble creature, woman, made for man's companion—
> HORNER
> So is that soft, gentle, tame, and more noble creature a spaniel, and has all their tricks; can fawn, lie down, suffer beating, and fawn the more; barks at your friends when they come to see you; makes your bed hard; gives you fleas, and the mange sometimes. And all the difference is, the spaniel's the more faithful animal and fawns but upon one master. (2.1.431–439)

Concerning the female characters of the comedy, it is fair to assume that Lady Fidget emerges as the prototypical, respectful woman of late-seventeenth century London. By analyzing se-

lected utterances, it is noticeable that she switches from on- to off-recordness, in dealing with female sexuality.

During the visits paid to Horner's and Pinchwife's mansions, she preserves her reputation by always displaying an irreprehensible attitude.[16] For instance, in the opening scene she refuses to indulge her husband (Sir Jaspar) in saluting the rake because such compliance would severely damage her public image. Then, she goes on-record and utters epithets like "rude fellow" (1.1.72), "saucy fellow" (1.1.88), "filthy French beast" (1.1.93), "filthy man" (1.1.103) determined to offend Horner who, according to her judgement, "cannot be civil to ladies" (1.1.115). Analogously, she emphasizes her firmness in the first scene of the following act, when she reproaches Sir Jaspar for letting Horner accompany her to the theatre: "Brute! Stinking, mortified, rotten French wether, to dare –" (2.1.443). Surprisingly, her tone drastically changes when, by the end of the second act, she starts doubting Horner's impotence:

507	LADY FIDGET: But Indeed, sit, as	
508–509	perfectly, perfectly, **the same man as before you going into France**, sir? As perfectly, perfectly?	**[OFF-R]**
510	HORNER: And perfectly, perfectly, madam. [...]	
511	**I desire to be tried only**, madam [...]	**[OFF-R]**
517–518	LADY FIDGET: **I have so strong a faith in your honour**, dear, dear, noble sir. [...]	**[P2]**
534	Master Horner is a thousand, thousand,	
535	times a better man than I thought him.	

[16] "[...] her language must create the picture of an honorable wife concerned not to commit 'an injury to a Husband'" (Weber, 1982, p. 113).

536	[...] I can name him, truly; not long ago, you	
537–538	know, I thought his very name obscenity, and **I would as soon have lain with him as have named him**.	**[ON-R]**

Table 4: 2.1.508–511, 518–519, 534–538

When trying to hide her real intentions – namely, to discover the truth about Horner's prowess – she goes off-record and opts for ambiguous language. Likewise, the allusive tone of lines 508, 511, 518, 519 and 535 may be considered as a threat to Horner's face, given that Lady Fidget is asking publicly for information about his private matters. However, the rake manages to read between the lines and answers accordingly, therefore not taking the question as an FTA, but as a chance to get closer to Sir Jaspar's wife and eventually seduce her. In addition, she recurses to a P2 strategy by exaggerating approval and encouraging statements to the gentleman. Such a budding friendship leads Lady Fidget to share her recondite thoughts and fantasies with the rake. This is particularly evident in the last act, during the so-called "dinner party"[17] at Horner's lodge:

92	LADY FIDGET: Our reputation! Lord, why should you not think that we women
93	make use of our reputation, as you men of yours, only to deceive
94	the world with less suspicion? Our virtue is like the statesman's
95	religion, the quaker's word, the gamester's oath, and the great

[17] On the scene, particularly pertinent is Weber (1982).

96	man's honour; but **to cheat those that trust us**. [...]	**[ON-R]**
105–106	HORNER: [...] But why that mighty pretence to honour?	
107	LADY FIDGET: We have told you; but sometimes 'twas for the same reason you	
108	men pretend business often, to avoid ill company, **to enjoy the better and more**	
109	**privately those you love**.	**[ON-R]**

Table 5: 5.4.92–96, 105–109

The excerpt reveals Lady Fidget and, metonymically, the inner selves of upper-society women in Restoration comedies: "[l]acking the substance of virtue, their honor resides only in words and appearance" (Morris, 1972, p. 4). By going on-record, she does not mince words and informs the people on stage – Horner, Mrs Dainty and Mrs Squeamish – that women have sexual desires as men do, although they are forced to quash such stimuli because of social conventions, in order to preserve both their reputation and the integrity of their marriages.

In any event, the lady's straightforwardness does not last long: a few lines ahead, she returns on track and invites her friends to preserve their most precious value: "sister sharers, let us not fall out, but have a care of our honour. Though we get no presents, no jewels of him, we are savers of our honour, the jewel of most value and use, which shines yet to the world unsuspected, though it be counterfeit" (5.4.153–157).

4. Conclusive Remarks

The present study aimed to approach William Wycherley's *The Country Wife* from a pragmatic perspective, to explore taboos

related to sex, physical deformity and gender discrimination. The analysis focused on the utterances spoken by Horner, Pinchwife and Lady Fidget. The excerpts show how the protagonist makes extensive use of negative impoliteness, a strategy that he oddly addresses towards himself most times, instead of damaging the hearer's face. Furthermore, he amuses people and plays along with the teasing brilliantly. The dialogue he exchanges with Sir Jaspar displays an intelligent use of jocular mockery, a strategy that epitomizes the spirit of Wycherley's sex comedy: so humorous and vibrant, it helps Horner to consolidate his position – letting everyone believe that he is indeed impotent, therefore harmless for both husbands and (adulterous) wives – and pursue his goal in total discretion without disfiguring the general mood of the play, spreading cheerfulness instead. Nevertheless, when he debates with Pinchwife – his antagonist and rival in love – we see how Horner's words become sharper. As he is determined to offend the interlocutor, he combines negative impoliteness with bald on-recordness, furthermore including swearwords in his attacks.

Lastly, a consideration on Lady Fidget, whose speeches were analyzed in the final part of the third section. Her ability to go either on- or off-record, according to the situation, underlines her being perceptive and observant. She is the perfect model of an experienced woman who knows what she wants and knows how to satisfy her ego without disrespecting the social conventions of her time.

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Afterword: Pragmatics from natural conversation to dramatic dialogue

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According to the meaning of the noun 'afterword' in the *Cambridge Thesaurus* online, the word may stay for "epilogue", "final section", "concluding addition/speech", "supplement" and others. This chapter, in fact, concludes the volume and aims to add something to what has been written so far, but, paradoxically, it may also sound as a foreword since it necessarily starts well before the studies contained in the book and has a very personal stance and weight.

More than four decades ago, in the late 1970s, I was part of a research group based at the university of Bologna, which focused on dialogue and interaction in drama. Its other 'Bolognese' members were Guy Aston, William Dodd, Giuseppe Martella, Paola Pugliatti, Rosalba Spinalbelli, and Romana Zacchi, while 'foreign' members were Susan Bassnett, Carla Dente, Keir Elam, Lino Falzon, and Steen Jansen. Guy, who sadly left us some years ago, was 'our man in London' since at the time he was attending his PhD course in Linguistics at the University of London, where his supervisor was H. G. Widdowson. He actually commuted between Bologna and London from where, every time he returned to Bologna, he brought fresh information,

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suggestions, books and photocopies of new material dealing with language as communication, discourse analysis, and stylistics generally speaking. Once, in 1979, he arrived with – besides articles and volumes on linguistics – a Cambridge University Press book entitled *Questions and Politeness: Strategies in Social Interaction*, edited by Esther N. Goody (1978), whose main part was occupied by a 'chapter' (in reality a book inside a book) by Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson: it was "Universals in language usage: Politeness phenomena" (pp. 56–324), i.e., the first version of *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage* (1987) by the latter authors. According to the group's custom, the fresh material brought over by Guy was divided among us and each member had to read and summarise the content of their assignment for the benefit of the others, so that all of us could share knowledge of the whole stuff. My assignment that time was to work on Brown and Levinson, so that I got to know their politeness theory and, in the end, I tried to apply it to Oscar Wilde's *A Woman of No Importance* in a paper presented at a conference in Messina (1982), out of which the collective volume *Interazione, dialogo, convenzioni: il caso del testo drammatico* ("Interaction, Dialogue, Conventions: The Case of the Dramatic Text") originated in 1983. Unfortunately, the book has always stayed in the shade, because at the time Italian scholars did not approach such linguistic problems on the one hand (especially related to literature and drama), and on the other it, being in Italian, remained unknown to English-speaking readers.

That was my first encounter with 'politeness phenomena' and since then, even if not always, I have been applying the theory to my later research. At any rate, I have never forgotten it. It is therefore with great pleasure that I welcome a volume like this, especially because I see that a young generation of scholars is now working successfully using Brown and Levinson's seminal politeness theory, enriched with its successive developments,

in particular with the 'impolite side' starting from Jonathan Culpeper's writings at the end of the 1990s. At the same time, the writers of this book never forget the 'forefathers' of the philosophy of language, of discourse analysis and of sociolinguistics such as John Austin, Erving Goffman, Paul Grice…

Pragmatics, i.e., the study of interactive language in context, started when an ample interdisciplinary approach, including the above-mentioned disciplines and others as well, was applied to human interaction, in order to analyse how people 'do things with words' (and silences) and how social relationships are defined when they interact. It has to do with real situations from which data for such an analysis have to be recorded first and retrieved afterwards. But here in this volume, and in many studies nowadays, what comes under a pragmatic lens is literature, either dialogic excerpts from narrative or, more often, plays. One of the objections to the application of pragmatic tools to drama, in Guy Aston's contribution to the aforementioned collective book (1983), was exactly that in literature – be it narrative or drama – the speakers are not real but created by an author, and therefore, their language cannot be studied via the tools of conversational analysis, since their dialogues are pre-organised. Just to think of a single phenomenon, in a play turn-taking is decided by the dramatist, not by the characters and not even by the actors who impersonate them. Speakers in a play, unless the author expressively wants to transmit relational troubles in the interaction, do not negotiate the order of turns: they just speak following the 'schedule' the author has written for them. What should be taken into consideration as a defence of the applicability of pragmatic analysis to drama, though, is that a playwright, when presenting a situation on a stage, shows his/her skill exactly if the imitation of reality sounds plausible, basing his/her art on the principal convention of the theatre, i.e., the Keatsian "suspension of disbelief" of the audience.

The analysis of speakers' socio-linguistic behaviour in modern times, since recording has been made available, could be seen as backing the negation of the scientific correctness of the use of other text types than collections of authentic and natural data. But what about past ages in general and the early modern period in particular, when there was no technology able to reproduce verbal (and behavioural) interaction? It is now generally accepted that both real documents and literary texts such as letters, court transcriptions, novels and especially plays can be considered fit for pragmatic investigation that put together history, linguistics, sociolinguistics, anthropology, and literary knowledge. The results of this type of research have often been able not only to shed fresh light on the structure and form of the various texts under analysis, but also to show the historical changes of language and manners – in other words, the role of diachrony has been newly stressed –, and to offer new insights for the artistic appreciation of drama and narrative. As stated by Jucker and Taavitsainen (2013, p. 9),

> Until recently, pragmatics shunned written sources as data. It was either based on intuition, for example in the philosophical investigations of speech acts, presupposition, deixis and implicatures, or it was based on recordings of spoken language. Neither of these avenues is available for historical investigations and, therefore, historical pragmaticists for a long time had to defend and justify the appropriateness of written data for their investigations.

The development of historical pragmatics, therefore, has made unavoidable the study of early modern plays as texts out of which discursive and dialogic routines can be examined as reflecting the language and the interactions of past times. In the British domain Shakespeare has been the main focus of this type of research, as the many references of three out of five chapters

in this volume show (those by Chiara Ghezzi, Emma Pasquali, and Aoife Beville) but other relevant playwrights and epochs of British theatre have come under investigation (see Jucker 2016, 2020). Fabio Ciambella's and Valentina Rossi's contributions in this volume exemplify, for example, the application of pragmalinguistic categories to seventeenth-century drama. What is relevant in all the five chapters is that the analyses carried out do not serve to prove the functionality of the theory/ies, but show how, through the application of certain theories, the chosen dramatic texts 'speak' more to the reader/audience so as to reveal implied meanings and the playwrights' stance in relation to their objects.

The focus of these chapters is taboo language, i.e., the language one uses not when one wants to be polite, but, on the contrary, when one wants to offend and to insult his/her interlocutor. Therefore, not so much Brown and Levinson's theory per se can be of help, but Culpeper's subsequent study of impoliteness in all its possible inflections and functions, and those of other scholars who have more recently added their research on top of the basic principles of (im)politeness. And the writers of this book show their continuous attention to the updatings of the pragmalinguistic domain.

The methodology used in the five chapters is based on a plurality of theoretical issues which are always introduced and correctly specified at the beginning of each contribution, thus making them self-contained and easily understandable also by non-pragmaticians. But I 'have a dream': I do hope that in the future this constant reference to theoretical explanations will not be felt as necessary because pragmalinguistics in the meantime has become shared knowledge among scholars and a simple reference to, for example, Austin 1962 will be able to remind most readers of the very basic tenets of speech acts. It is not this time yet, consequently scholars feel it mandatory to furnish

explanatory details, even if this means subtracting space to the core of their analysis, although this confers solid and objective strength to well-read individual inquiries.

All contributions show how certain uses of language can provoke affective reactions in the onstage addressee, thus highlighting how dramatists play with their characters' words in order to orient the audience's reception and understanding. According to this, Chiara Ghezzi focuses on such a wordy character as Richard III in the homonymous Shakespeare history play, whose interactive language is often abusive, or ambiguously flattering, always (or nearly so) ready to offend, therefore full of impolite strategies, of ironic implicatures, of deadly verbal thrusts. For Richard language is an instrument to augment his power both when interacting with men (the duke of Buckingham, for example), and with women, thus also highlighting his deeply gendered discourse.

Taboos are not present only in the verbal domain, but also – and at a higher level, determining language use – in social intercourse. To these Emma Pasquali dedicates her study investigating behavioural taboos in the trial scene of *The Merchant of Venice*.

On the contrary, Aoife Beville studies how silence in the interpersonal communication in Shakespeare's *All's Well that Ends Well* and *Measure for Measure* performs a very relevant role in filtering the relationships between characters and in revealing its strength as a pragmatic tool to elicit or to preclude certain non-verbal stances, bringing the onstage interlocutor and the audience to feel engaged emotionally in disentangling the meaning of silent moments.

Fabio Ciambella and Valentina Rossi also investigate gender issues emerging from the context of their chosen plays, Fletcher's *Bonduca*, and Wycherley's *The Country Wife*, respectively. In the classical, Roman, world of *Bonduca*, women not only suffer the tragic events of the plot, but they also show a conversation-

ally defeated attitude that displays the power imbalance between male and female speakers and the social (male) fear of dominant women. In the latter case, on the other hand, the particular situation of Restoration society, where women appear powerful in their social games, reveals the playwright's ability in mirroring acts and discourses of both men and women able to shift from politeness to impoliteness and from on- to off-record strategies.

Almost every contribution in this volume approaches its text both from a quantitative and a qualitative perspective, bringing the two to interact and to shed light on each other. This helps understand that 'numbers' are not enemies of literary investigation, when they are interpreted as a solid basis on which to build, and to give relevance to, a researcher's sharable personal insights about literary objects. Pragmalinguistics applied to drama offers, as all the chapters published here demonstrate, a way to appreciate on the one hand the individual plays they focus upon, and on the other an understanding of the cultures (and the authors) that produced them, also offering paths for further investigations which could as well include a linguistic approach to language usage and its diachronic transformations.

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Bionotes

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This volume focuses on insults and swear words. It does so through methodological frameworks specific to historical pragmatics, pragmalinguistics, cultural studies, and English historical linguistics, among others. Variously called S-T words, SOTL (Swearing, Offensive, and Taboo Language), or simply taboo language, insults and offences are the object of the analyses conducted in the five chapters of this edited collection, with the aim of shedding some light on the complex interweaving relationship between contemporary theories and early modern English language.
This edited collection of essays consists of five chapters encompassing a time span from the late sixteenth century to the second half of the seventeenth. The case studies considered for the analyses carried out are early modern English plays. Although three of the chapters focus on Shakespearean texts, two of them offer insights into other playwrights' use of taboo language. An afterword by Prof. Roberta Mullini follows the five chapters and closes the collection.

Fabio Ciambella is a Researcher of English at Sapienza University of Rome. His research interests include the intricate relationship between dance and early modern language, historical pragmatics, corpus linguistics, culinary linguistics, and Second Language Acquisition. His most recent publications include *Dance Lexicon in Shakespeare and His Contemporaries: A Corpus-based Approach* (Routledge, 2021), which is a corpus-based analysis of dance-related language in the plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, and a book on teaching English pragmatics with Shakespeare (*Teaching English as a Second Language with Shakespeare*, Cambridge University Press, 2024).

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