

Figuring Ineloquence in Late Sixteenth-century Poetry

David J. Amelang

On his first appearance in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, the titular character suffers what we would now describe as an emotional meltdown. After some quick-witted repartee with his mother and his newly crowned uncle, Hamlet is left all alone on the stage for his first soliloquy, during which he tries to put into words his feelings regarding the recent death of his father and his mother's hasty marriage to his uncle. Throughout the prince frequently chokes up and is often unable to finish his sentences. His speech breaks down, blunting the melodious cadence of the underlying iambic pentameter with sudden arhythmic outbursts and screeching track changes in his train of thought:

But two months dead – nay, not so much, not two –
So excellent a king, that was to this
Hyperion to a satyr, so loving to my mother
That he might not beteem the winds of heaven
Visit her face too roughly! Heaven and earth,
Must I remember? Why, she should hang on him
As if increase of appetite had grown
By what it fed on, and yet within a month –
Let me not think on't; frailty, thy name is woman –
A little month, or ere those shoes were old
With which she followed my poor father's body,
Like Niobe, all tears, why she, even she –
O God, a beast that wants discourse of reason
Would have mourned longer! – married with my uncle,
My father's brother, but no more like my father
Than I to Hercules . . .¹

The prosody of this soliloquy stands out for its raw emotional verisimilitude and iconicity.² It convincingly reads and sounds not as words

written by a poetic dramatist but rather as speech, which at times appears to be somewhat spontaneous and with flickers of improvisation. This is not the first instance of what I have elsewhere described as Shakespeare's rhetoric of iconic distress, in which he moves away from ornate and musical verse in scenes depicting overwhelming anguish and suffering in favour of a more realistic and pain-stricken linguistic style. It is, I argue, one of the first conscientious attempts to deploy systematically a series of tropes and figures of speech that artificially mirror the natural disruptions language suffers when a speaker is overcome by such grief and sorrow that words fail altogether.³ Shakespeare employs the same rhetorical devices and strategies – perhaps even more effectively – in other well-known scenes in his plays, such as Othello's handkerchief-laden rant, the dying words of Lear, Leontes' fit of jealousy towards the beginning of *The Winter's Tale*, and a long and sustained roster of other scenes.

Others of Shakespeare's contemporary dramatists, especially beginning in the early years of the seventeenth century, also endowed characters undergoing intense emotions and distress with this style of language. This clearly suggests that there was a slow yet growing attraction for linguistic verisimilitude on the Elizabethan-Jacobean stage, a period broadly defined by strongly codified poetic forms and highly ornate rhetoric, and that a series of tropes and figures of speech facilitated the disruption of these otherwise firmly established expectations. But can the same be said of the non-dramatic literature of the time? Did the English poets of the final decades of the sixteenth century resort to the same rhetorical devices that their playwriting counterparts used? This chapter seeks to answer these questions by exploring representations of ineloquence in the poetry of late Elizabethan England. In particular, it analyses the relationship between theory and practice during this period with regard to a short list of tropes and figures ideally suited to mimicking inarticulate speech. To that end, the first half of the chapter focuses on the descriptions of these under-scrutinised linguistic devices in the most prominent rhetorical treatises and manuals of the time. Thereafter follows an analysis of a selection of poems from the period that reveals not only how different writers resorted to these devices, but also the different ways in which they deployed them.

Towards a Poetics of Ineloquence

'When a construction recurs often enough', writes John Porter Houston, 'it begins to constitute a rhetoric.'⁴ While undoubtedly

many tropes and figures can be deployed in order to imbue language with apparent ineloquence and incoherence, Shakespeare and his contemporary dramatists relied on a short list of devices when characterising their speeches of overwhelming distress. The recurring nature of these choices speaks directly to Houston's observation, as one is witness in these scenes to the development of a pattern. And these choices do not seem to be coincidental. In fact, if one reads descriptions of these figures in the most prominent manuals of rhetoric from the period, they are consistently singled out as the most effective vehicles for transmitting emotional turmoil. The following pages concentrate on the tropes in question, along with descriptions and examples derived directly from three of England's most important and widely read treatises and manuals from the late sixteenth century: Henry Peacham's *The Garden of Eloquence* (1592), George Puttenham's *The Art of English Poesy* (1589) and Angel Day's *The English Secretary* (1592).⁵

The most frequently used trope in speeches depicting emotional ineloquence is *ecphonesis*. Puttenham explains that he translated this into English as 'the Outcry' because 'it utters our mind by all such words as do show any extreme passion, whether it be by way of exclamation or crying out, admiration or wondering, imprecation or cursing, obtestation or taking God and the world to witness, or any such like as declare an impotent affection'.⁶ In other words, it is a sudden exclamatory outburst that results from the speaker's emotional state. Peacham echoes Puttenham when he defines *ecphonesis* as 'a forme of speech by which the Orator through some vehement affection, as either love, hatred, gladnesse, sorrow, anger, marvelling, admiration, feare, or such like, bursteth forth into an exclamation or outcrie, signifying thereby the vehement affection or passion of his mind'.⁷ Both rhetoricians highlight the trope's ability to convey extreme passions and affections; Angel Day shares their opinion, and succinctly describes *ecphonesis* as an exclamation 'which hath signification of grieffe or indignation of a thing, as of grief'.⁸ Outcries of this nature are extremely common in Elizabethan plays, and are a constant presence in speeches such as Hamlet's first soliloquy shown above.

Two other figures that are directly related to *ecphonesis* and that also feature prominently in these passages are *epizeuxis* and *ploce*. Day describes *epizeuxis* as the 'redoubling of a worde, by vehemencie to expresse a thing'.⁹ That is, it is the immediate repetition – whether once or multiple times – of a single word. Puttenham's definition falls along the same lines as Day's, and Peacham simply adds to it that the

figure is used ‘commonly with a swift pronunciation’.¹⁰ *Ploce* is like *epizeuxis* except that the repetition is not immediate; as Puttenham explains, it is the ‘speedy iteration of one word, but with some little intermission by inserting one or two words between’.¹¹ These two figures, especially when combined with *ecphonesis*, imbue the language of characters with fixation and redundancy and directly challenge its eloquence and flow. This is precisely the point Puttenham puts forth in his account of other figures of repetition, whose effects he describes as

nothing commendable, and therefore are not observed in good poesy, as a vulgar rhymers who doubled one word in the end of every verse . . . These repetitions be not figurative but fantastical, for a figure is ever used to a purpose either of beauty or of efficacy; and these last recited be to no purpose, for neither can ye say that it urges affection, nor that it beautifieth or enforceth the sense, nor hath any other subtlety in it, and therefore is a very foolish impertinence of speech and not a figure.¹²

Repeating the same word – in Puttenham’s opinion – adds neither beauty nor coherence to the line of verse; a bad poet, he claims, would rely on such figures to come up with a rhyme and there is no place for such ‘foolish impertinencies’ in good poetry.

Puttenham’s opinion notwithstanding, dramatists such as Shakespeare often lined up a series of repeated shouts in their passages of distress:

Lie with her? Lie on her? We say ‘lie on her’ when they belie her. Lie with her? ’Swounds, that’s fulsome! Handkerchief – confessions – handkerchief. To confess and be hanged for his labour. First to be hanged, and then to confess! I tremble at it. Nature would not invest herself in such a shadowing passion without some instruction. It is not words that shakes me thus. Pish! Noses, ears, and lips! Is’t possible? Confess? Handkerchief! O devil!¹³

And my poor fool is hanged. No, no, no life!
Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life
And thou no breath at all? O thou’lt come no more,
Never, never, never, never, never!
Pray you undo this button. Thank you, sir. [O, O, O, O!].
Do you see this? Look on her, look, her lips,
Look there, look there!¹⁴

In these particularly painful scenarios centred on Othello’s discovery of his wife’s apparent affair and Lear breaking down after the death

of his daughter and his jester; the combined deployment of *ecphonesis* with either *epizeuxis* or *ploce* helps convey effectively the characters' inability to cope with what has just happened to them. It is precisely because these passages seek not verbal eloquence but quite the opposite, the handicapped language of an anguished mind, that the eye and ear find these figures to be well placed and put to good use.

Another perhaps less obvious but even more effective figure in this sense is *aposiopesis*. Peacham describes this syntactic device as 'a forme of speech by which the Orator through some affection, as either of fear, anger, sorrow, bashfulnesse or such like, breaketh off his speech before it be all ended'.¹⁵ Elizabethan writers resorted to *aposiopesis* relatively frequently in passages of distress, but more often than not they did so while following a very specific formula: a performative utterance, in which the speaker declares his or her inability to speak.¹⁶ A perfect example of this trope in action is Cleopatra in Mary Sidney's *Antonius* (1592) uttering with her final breath 'I can no more, I die'.¹⁷ Another unrelated sub-genre of poetry in which this technique was used with relative frequency is the erotic epyllion, in which early modern poets often resorted to the Ovidian *cetera quis nescit?* ('who does not know the rest?') refrain as a way of hinting at the lovers' consummation. The following two examples come from Christopher Marlowe's translation of Ovid's *Amores* (c. 1580s) and John Marston's *Metamorphosis of Pygmalion's Image* (1599):

I cling'd her naked body, downe she fell,
Judge you the rest, being tird she bad me kisse;
Jove send me more such after noones as this.¹⁸

Who knowes not what ensues? O pardon me
Yee gaping eares that swallow vp my lines
Expect no more.¹⁹

Returning to representations of distress, some writers also employed *aposiopesis* in a more literal sense, with a speaker's train of thought derailing mid-sentence and switching to a different syntactic construction in the manner of what descriptive linguists refer to as *anacolutha*. This second interpretation of the classical trope, which I term 'literal *aposiopesis*' to distinguish it from the 'performative' version, comes closer to Puttenham and Day's definitions; the latter wrote of *aposiopesis* that it is 'when by passing to another matter, we stop our speech on a sodaine, as it were in an interrupted or discontented moode'.²⁰ Such levels of linguistic disruption went against all precepts

and conventions of poetic discourse in late sixteenth-century England, which emphasised linguistic elegance and rhythmic harmony. And yet, despite its unorthodox and disruptive intent, poets and playwrights alike occasionally relied on this technique due to its potential effectiveness to capture the pathology of emotional strain, as depicted perfectly in Hamlet's soliloquy cited above. Gavin Alexander explains it best in his analysis of *aposiopesis* in the poems of Philip Sidney:

At the same time as rhetoric contains aposiopesis, aposiopesis threatens it . . . Elocutio, the rhetorical choosing of words and figures of speech, means eloquence, and is opposed by ineloquence. And elocutio means speaking, which is opposed by silence. But it also, literally, means speaking out, and that is opposed by significant silence, speaking in, aposiopesis. Silence therefore runs the risk of being taken for insignificance, and it is this flirtation with ineloquence which gives aposiopesis its force.²¹

The last figure to be included in this overview of rhetorical ineloquence, and very closely connected to this literal interpretation of *aposiopesis*, is *parenthesis*. A 'figure of tolerable disorder' in the words of Puttenham, *parenthesis* 'is when ye will seem for larger information or some other purpose to piece or graft in the midst of your tale an unnecessary parcel of speech, which nevertheless may be thence without any detriment to the rest'.²² Both Peacham and Day agree with Puttenham in describing the use of parenthetical interjections as tolerable if slightly distracting disruptions of syntactic harmony. 'It is a form of speech', Peacham writes,

which setteth a sentence a sunder by the interposition of another, or thus: When a sentence is cast between the speech before it be all ended, which although it giveth some strength, yet being taken away, it leaveth the same speech perfect enough.²³

As is the case with *aposiopesis*, the basic premise behind *parenthesis* is an alteration of natural and complete syntax. Parentheticals also resembled *aposiopesis* in that if deployed with enough bluntness, writers could use them to deviate and disrupt the underlying coherence in the speech of characters.

If so desired, all these figures – whether used in isolation or combined with each other – can help recreate the acute and brisk jumps and jolts warranted by certain scenes in which the mind's regular flow of thought is disturbed. Writers from the late Elizabethan period could turn to the rhetorical manuals of the time to find the necessary tools to elaborate a discourse built around the notion of

poetic ineloquence. Or at least they could attempt to free discourse from the constraints of linguistic embellishment and artificiality, not unlike the psychological stream of consciousness narrative style that modernist novelists developed from the turn of the twentieth century. Most of the evidence of late sixteenth-century authors pursuing this conscious ineloquence so far put forth comes from the sphere of drama; the following section explores how Elizabethan England's poets engaged with the (un)rheterical figures of speech that contemporary theorists mobilised in order to convey overwhelming passion, grief and sorrow.

Syntactic Disruption, Rhythmic Consonance

During a brief stint in prison in 1537 for slapping a courtier, Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, wrote the sonnet 'The Geraldine'. It was dedicated to then 10-year-old Elizabeth Fitzgerald, the future Countess of Lincoln, whose beauty had infatuated him to the point of poetic action. A little over sixty years later, in 1597, Michael Drayton included his own rendition of Surrey's predicament in a love-torn letter as part of his *Englands Heroicall Epistles* collection. In its closing lines, Drayton's earl turns to well-worn imagery to express his love for the young Countess:

Love did us both with one-selfe Arrow strike,
 Our Wound's both one, our Cure should be the like;
 Except thou hast found out some mean by Art,
 Some pow'rfull Med'cine to withdraw the dart,
 But mine is fixt, and absence being proved,
 It stickes too fast, it cannot be removed.

Adieu, Adieu, from *Florence* when I goe,
 By my next Letters GERALDINE shall know,
 Which if good fortune shall by course direct,
 From Venice by some messenger expect;
 Till when, I leave thee to thy hearts desire,
 By him that lives thy vertues to admire.²⁴

Throughout the poem, Surrey occasionally finds himself doubling words and phrases at moments of peak emotionality, such as the parting farewells highlighted above. A combination of *ecphonesis* (the outcry) and *epizeuxis* (the doubling of words) alerts the reader to the vehemence of the speaker's passion, as prescribed by Peacham,

Puttenham and Day. Nevertheless, the use of these figures of ineloquence does not affect the prosody and melodic cadence of the poem: the repeated *adieux* fit hand in glove into the epistle's iambic pentameter, and their position at the beginning of the line allows the sequence of rhyming couplets to continue without disruption.

The doubled outcry is one of the most recurrent and visible expressions of melodramatic anguish in Elizabethan poetry. As it relates to the topic at hand, Drayton's poem is in no way exceptional; far from it, his use of *ecphonesis* could be described as archetypal. The exact same technique can be seen deployed continuously throughout the lyrical productions of sixteenth-century England, such as in the induction to Thomas Sackville's *The Mirror of Magistrates* (1563) and in the anonymously written 'The Seafarer' included in *Tottel's Miscellany* (1557):

Nor worthy Hector worthiest of them all,
Her Hope, her Ioy, his Force is now for naught.
O *Troy, Troy*, there is no boote but bale,
The hugy Horse within thy Wales is brought:
Thy Turrets fall, thy Knights that whilome fought
In Arms amid the Field, are slayne in Bed,
Thy Gods defilde, and all thy honour dead.²⁵

Shall I thus ever long, and be no whit the neare,
And shall I still complain to thee, the which me will not heare?
Alas say nay, say nay, and be no more so dome,
But open thou thy manly mouth, and say that thou wilt come.
Wherby my hart may thinke, although I see not thee,
That thou wilt come thy word so sware, if thou a lives man be.²⁶

Sackville's induction is a perfect mirror of Drayton's technique; 'The Seafarer' is written in iambic hexameter instead of pentameter and the doubling device used is *ploce* instead of *epizeuxis*, but its underlying effect and purpose remain the same. These rhetorical choices represent the broader trend of how most Elizabethan poets engaged with figures of ineloquence. Rather than placing these potentially disruptive elements in positions that would challenge the flow of the verse, they capitalise on the repetitiveness of the doubling to enhance the line's musicality. While figures such as *epizeuxis* or *ploce* in their essence distort the inner logic and conventions of language, examples such as these show that they need not be at odds with regular poetic rhythm.

Far from it, Elizabethan poets seemed to hold the rhythmic cadence of doubled outcries in particularly high regard. It is not uncommon to see these figures deployed in positions of significant musical importance.

Thomas Proctor, in his 'A Proper Sonnet, how Time Consumeth All Things' (1578), begins every first and third line of each quatrain with the same repeated shouts:

Ay me, ay me! I sigh to see the scythe afield;
Down goeth the grass, soon wrought to withered hay.
Ay me, alas! Ay me, alas! That beauty needs must yield,
And princes pass, as grass doth fade away.

Ay me, ay me! That life cannot have lasting leave,
Nor gold take hold of everlasting day.
Ay me, alas! Ay me, alas! That time hath talents to receive,
And yet no time can make a sure stay.²⁷

Within this pattern, the anaphoric cries play the role of anchors that bind the poem's different stanzas together; effectively, they serve the same purpose as the end-of-stanza refrain that one often sees in poems and songs. And, not coincidentally, refrains are another recurrent locus for ineloquent figures in sixteenth-century English poetry, which yet again highlight the musical value that poets of the period placed on these devices. In the following excerpts – the first from a song attributed to Thomas Wyatt (1530s) and the second from Philip Sidney's fourth song in *Astrophil and Stella* (1580s), separated by a fifty-year span in which many lyrical conventions changed – the refrains follow the same pattern, presumably with the same musical purpose in mind:

Heaven and earth and all that hear me plain
Do well perceive what care doth cause me cry,
Save you alone, to whom I cry in vain
'Mercy! Madame, alas! *I die, I die!*'

If that you sleep, I humbly you require
Forbear a while, and let your rigour slake –
Since that by you I burn thus in this fire –
To hear my plaint, 'Dear heart, *awake! awake!*'

Since that so oft ye have made me to wake
In plaint and tears and in right piteous case,
Displease you not, if force do now me make
To break your sleep, crying '*Alas! alas!*'²⁸

Onely joy, now here you are,
Fit to heare and ease my care:
Let my whispering voyce obtaine,

Sweete reward for sharpest paine:
 Take me to thee, and thee to me.
 'No, no, no, no, my Deare, let be.'

Night hath closd all in her cloke,
 Twinckling starres Love-thoughts provoke:
 Danger hence good care doth keepe,
 Jealousie it selfe doth sleepe:
 Take me to thee, and thee to me.
 'No, no, no, no, my Deare, let be.'²⁹

It is clear, thus, that English poets were not shying away from using *epizeuxis*, *ploce* and other disruptors of prosody: Sidney goes even further by quadrupling the *no*'s, doubling down on the conventional single-repetition schemes. What is also evident is that they did not allow these figures to create bumps in the melody of the iambic verse. Quite the contrary, their strategic placement of repetition-based emotional outbursts more often than not imbue the lines with an incantatory quality that strengthens the poems' musicality as opposed to weakening it; indeed, the fact that the formula used in these repetitive patterns is internally built as markedly iambic sequences effectively reinforces the overall pattern. Whereas Shakespeare's use of these devices in the aforementioned passages cause rhythmic glitches and syncopations, that is not the case in these poems, in which one can read and intellectually perceive the anguish and distress of the lyrical I while the beat of the verse marches on, uninterrupted.

This observation, here presented as a miscellany of poetic excerpts, is based on the reading of several hundred poems written throughout the sixteenth century. With little variation over time, Tudor England's poets turned to these conduits of ineloquence with relative frequency. Yet they rarely resorted to them so as actually to cripple the flow of the verse: they operate instead as signals of emotional instability within an otherwise unwaveringly stable line. As one can see below, however, in the final decades of the century some poets did start to experiment with more overt challenges to the sanctity of the eloquent line.

Hearing Sense in Nonsense

In a particularly provocative essay, Stephen Booth once argued that Shakespeare was England's most underrated poet because he – unlike most of his contemporaries – was able to write linguistically unintelligible

yet emotionally comprehensible speech. In certain passages of the playwright's canon, Booth writes, 'one is hearing sense in nonsense'.³⁰ Booth's description of what he deems a uniquely Shakespearean talent makes clear the connection that he establishes between the works of the Elizabethan-Jacobean dramatist and the narrative style of some early twentieth-century novelists who aimed to recreate the chaotic nature of one's inner monologue. Indeed, at least from the turn of the seventeenth century onwards, Shakespeare did develop an idiolect of distress and mental anguish that does share some similarities with the Joycean stream of consciousness. The two language patterns inhabited the same common ground, one that could be described – in a general way – as a conscious disregard for the linguistic principles of order and clarity, with particular emphasis on the disruption of conventional syntactic structures. A jumbled sentence reflects a jumbled mind, and a character's inability to communicate properly and elegantly speaks to their emotional turmoil.

While Shakespeare reaches the high point of the rhetoric of distress in the so-called major tragedies discussed previously (*Hamlet*, *Othello* and *Macbeth*), it is important to recognise that he explored less intense iterations of the same formula both in earlier and later stages of his career as well, as the following passages from *Richard III* (1593) and *The Winter's Tale* (1610), two plays separated by almost two decades, underline:

Give me another horse! Bind up my wounds!
 Have mercy, Jesu! – Soft, I did but dream.
 O coward conscience, how dost thou afflict me?
 The lights burn blue. It is now dead midnight.
 Cold fearful drops stand on my trembling flesh.
 What do I fear? Myself? There's none else by.
 Richard loves Richard; that is, I am I.
 Is there a murderer here? No. Yes, I am.
 Then fly! What, from myself? Great reason. Why?
 Lest I revenge. Myself upon myself?³¹

. . . Come, sir page,
 Look on me with your welkin eye. Sweet villain,
 Most dear'st, my collop! Can thy dam? – may't be? –
 Affection, thy intention stabs the centre.
 Thou dost make possible things not so held,
 Communicat'st with dreams – how can this be? –
 With what's unreal thou coactive art,
 And fellows't nothing.³²

These are two completely different scenes, one in which the embattled and terrified Richard is fending off both soldiers and ghosts in the middle of a battlefield and another in which Leontes is becoming consumed with unwarranted jealousy over his wife Hermione's imagined infidelity, featuring the same incoherent and rambling style that so quickly jumps off the page. And presiding over the centre of this stylistic detour is *aposiopesis*, the rhetorical device Puttenham vernacularised as 'the Figure of Silence, or of Interruption'.³³

As we saw above, there are two completely different ways of understanding and deploying *aposiopesis*. The first is as a performative utterance in which speakers verbally express their inability or lack of will to carry on. This technique was a favourite with Philip Sidney and his admirers, for instance, as the heroic couplet in Samuel Daniel's 42nd sonnet to Delia exemplifies:

When thou surcharg'd with burthen of thy yeeres,
Shalt bend thy wrinkles homeward to the earth,
When time hath made a pasport for thy seares,
Dated in age the Kalends of our death
But ah no more, this hath beene often tolde,
And women grieue to thinke they must be olde.³⁴

This is not, however, the figure that anchors what Booth describes as Shakespeare's sensical nonsense. It is the other interpretation of *aposiopesis*, the literal interruption of a syntactic structure, that lies at the centre of the passages of turbulent inner monologue featured throughout this chapter.³⁵ Unlike its performative counterpart, literal *aposiopesis* breaks off the end of a syntactic unit without providing any form of semantic closure. In doing so, writers convey the emotional turmoil of speakers not by what they are saying, but by their inability to speak coherently. And while it is virtually impossible to find examples of this usage of the trope in poems from the late Elizabethan period, it appears only rarely in the plays either, including Shakespeare. That said, some of the other devices that play a significant role in Shakespeare's idiolect of distress also feature in lyrical works to a similar, if perhaps less dramatic, effect.

In the type of literal *aposiopesis* that ends up deriving into an anacoluthon, a speaker abruptly interrupts what they are saying, leaving the sentence incomplete and moving on to a different utterance. It is precisely that dispersal of thought and lack of discipline that so effectively transmits the speaker's inner turmoil. When employed with this same intent, *parenthesis* can also convey a similar level of

psychological meandering. Instead of interrupting a thought never to return and flesh it out, the parenthetical digression inserts a second utterance in between the two halves of a full and self-sufficient sentence; by doing so the poet recreates the speaker's lack of mental focus or of ability to remain composed and coherent throughout the entirety of the pronouncement:

I might, *unhappie word, (woe me)* I might,
 And then would not, or could not see my blisse.
 Till now, wrapped in a most infernal night,
 I find how heavenly day (*wretch*) did I miss.
 Hart rent thy self, thou doest thy selfe but right,
 . . .
 And yet could not by rising Morne foresee,
 How faire a day was near, (*ô punisht eyes*)
 That I had been more foolish, or more wise.³⁶

This excerpt from Sidney's sonnet 33 of *Astrophil and Stella*, and especially its first line, provides a poignant representation of what is meant by *parenthesis* here. It might refer to the actual use of parenthetical punctuation markers, or it might appear in between commas as an embedded clause; regardless of its visual presentation on the page, it is the syntactic digression that concerns us. In scenes and poems of emotional distress, these interpolations – more often than not outcries à la *ecphonesis* – become more and more frequent, especially in the poems from the 1580s onwards. They do not challenge the formal expectations of verse, with both metre and rhyme staying steady and on course, but they definitely add hiccups – and draw attention – to the prosody and intelligibility of the line. Moreover, a sliver of emotional iconicity imbues the pathos of the highly codified written language, as if one were spontaneously shouting instead of meticulously writing these words. This is the case in many passages of Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, including this stanza from the Mask of Cupid:

Her brest all naked, as nett yuory,
 Without adorne of gold or siluer bright,
 Wherewith the Craftesman wonts it beautify,
 Of her dew honour was despoyled quight,
 And a wide wound therein (*O ruefull sight*)
 Entrenched deepe with knife accursed keene,
 Yet freshly bleeding forth her fainting spright,
 (*The worke of cruell hand*) was to be seene,
 That dyde in sanguine red her skin all snowy cleene.³⁷

These are clearly not instances of sensical nonsense, at least not in the way Booth meant. What Shakespeare achieves in those passages goes beyond the strategic deployment of rhetorical devices, and even only in the most heightened of circumstances can one really assert that all channels of verbal communication have truly broken down. Nevertheless, it is through the conscious use of these often under-scrutinised figures of speech that poets and playwrights alike season their words with a waft of natural spontaneity, despite the unapologetically artificial and ornamental nature of verse writing in this literary period. It is ‘unpoetic poetry’, to repurpose Maurice Charney’s term:³⁸ occasional outbursts, unprompted repetitions of words or phrases, unfinished syntax and sentences complicated by meandering thoughts and interjected digressions . . . these are what one witnesses in real-life moments of distress. Considering the medium in which they appear, one can and should immediately acknowledge that these devices seem somewhat out of place, and yet they sound and read and feel right, especially when considering their circumstances.

Conclusion

Under the auspices of a volume that aims to shed new light on under-scrutinised and neglected elements of sixteenth-century English poetry, this chapter offers at least two points of contact with its broader themes of analysis. The first is that the rhetorical devices at the core of what I have described as the poetics of ineloquence have for the most part been neglected not only by literary critics, but also by the poets and lyricists of the Elizabethan period. Clearly these should not be counted among the most popular or recurrent figures of speech in late sixteenth-century poetry, in terms of both writing as well as of critical reading. And for good reason, which leads to the second point of contact: these devices, when used ably, can recreate a style of writing that appears to be improvised and unscripted. Or, to capitalise on one of the keywords of this volume, *unwritten*.

There does not seem to have been much of a market in Elizabethan England for unpoetic poetry. It was served in small bites and appeared only in (some, not all) situations of maximal emotional distress. One witnesses an increase in the use of iconic ineloquence in the poems of the Jacobean and Caroline periods, which can confidently be attributed to the philosophical and artistic trends that distinguished the Baroque from the Renaissance: artists and writers in sixteenth-century Europe – including England – demonstrate a stronger propensity for

order, balance and elegance than their more disruptive and chaos-curious successors. What is less easy to explain, however, is the disparate presence of the rhetoric of distress in the writings of late Elizabethan poets and their dramatic counterparts. Not only do both belong to the same period and to the same cultural and literary current, in some cases they are the same people. Moreover, most of the dramatic output of this time also appeared in verse. And yet there is an indisputable difference between the levels of iconicity found in the two.

Two possible explanations occur to me. The first is that in late Elizabethan drama, and especially in scenes that feature instances of poetic ineloquence, the use of blank verse is much more common than rhyming verse. The lack of rhyme automatically reduces the artifice and musicality of the line, and lends itself more comfortably to further explorations of arhythmic prosody and mid-line hitches. On the other hand, most poems follow strict metrical and rhyme patterns, and thus the poet would have to work harder than the playwright to make the peg fit the hole. The second explanation involves the nature of the medium itself. Dramatic texts are generally composed as dialogue spoken among characters with some degree of verisimilitude; consequently, there is a certain expectation – or at least potential – for iconic speech. Since poetry is inherently an artificial apparatus, much more so than drama, the presence within it of verisimilar (and in this case ineloquent) language is harder to justify. Unlike in drama, there is little conceit of spontaneity in poetry, which renders out of place any writing technique that simulates an inability to speak due to shock.

These formal and essential considerations aside, it is nevertheless noteworthy that poets still found ways of inserting these rhetorical figures into their works without using a shoehorn. The need to appease the rhythm and rhyme constraints does diminish their disruptive quality, but only to a point. When I found the first instances of syntactic interruptions and emotional outbursts in these poems, seamlessly integrated into the artifice of the rhyming verse, it immediately reminded me of the way in which early modern Spanish playwrights engaged with these figures as well. Golden Age Spanish plays, unlike English ones, follow strict metre and rhyme conventions, which leaves precious little room for anacolutha and similar linguistic disruptions. However, Spanish dramatists figured out a way to have these broken sentences complement each other as fragments of a shared line of verse, as can be seen here in the opening lines of Lope de Vega's *Los locos de Valencia* (*Madness in Valencia*):

FLORIANO: ¡Oh, amigo en amistad; en sangre, hermano!
Yo he dado. . .

VALERIO: ¡Hablad!

FLORIANO: *Yo he dado. . .*

VALERIO: ¡Decid!

FLORIANO: *Muerte. . .*

VALERIO: ¿A quién?

FLORIANO: ¿Óyenos alguien?

VALERIO: Nadie.

FLORIANO: A un hombre,
que por mi mal . . .

VALERIO: Decidlo; ¿qué os divierte?³⁹

The ingenuity of Spanish playwrights, much like that of English poets with whom they share the more formal medium of rhymed verse, shines through in such instances of poetic innovation. By using these rhetorical figures occasionally to chip away at both the eloquence as well as the linguistic correctness of their otherwise dependably prosodic verse, writers were able to communicate more viscerally the emotional despair of those moments in life in which words inevitably fall short.

Notes

1. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 1.2.138–53, in *Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Greenblatt, 1676.
2. Derived from the term ‘icon’, the notion of iconicity was developed by Olga Fischer and Max Nänny to refer to instances in literature that have a high degree of lifelike aesthetics; an icon, Fischer explains, is ‘an image that more or less reflects a situation, concept, or object in the real world’ (‘Iconicity in Language and Literature’, 65). See also Fischer and Nänny, ‘Introduction: Iconicity as a Creative Force in Language Use’; ‘Introduction: Iconicity and Nature’.
3. For more, see Amelang, ‘A Broken Voice’; and Sacks, ‘Where Words Prevail Not’.
4. Houston, *Shakespearean Sentences*, 45.
5. For *The Garden of Eloquence* I have relied primarily on the 1593 edition, an expanded and more detailed revision of the original 1577 publication; similarly, while the first edition of *The English Secretary* was published in 1586, I cite from the second edition of 1592 in which Day included for the first time an appendix with the different figures and their definitions. I would also like to credit here the importance of the digital project *Silva Rhetoricae*, <<http://rhetoric.byu.edu>>, an online

- compendium of sources and explanations on the art of rhetoric, in the development of this essay.
6. Puttenham, *Art of English Poesy*, ed. Whigham and Rebhorn, 297.
 7. Peacham, *Garden of Eloquence*, 62.
 8. Day, *English Secretarie*, 96.
 9. *Ibid.*, 93.
 10. Peacham, *Garden of Eloquence*, 47; Puttenham, *Art of English Poesy*, 285.
 11. Puttenham, *Art of English Poesy*, 285.
 12. *Ibid.*, 286.
 13. Shakespeare, *Othello*, 4.1.34–41, in *Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Greenblatt, 2147.
 14. Shakespeare, *King Lear*, 5.3.304–10, in *Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Greenblatt, 2552. Bracketed interjections added from the Quarto text, ed. Greenblatt, 2472.
 15. Peacham, *Garden of Eloquence*, 118.
 16. The concept of performative utterance was first discussed by British philosopher J. L. Austin. See his seminal work *How to Do Things with Words*.
 17. As cited in Alexander, 'Sidney's Interruptions', 192.
 18. Marlowe, *All Ovids Elegies*, I.5.24–6, in *Complete Works*, ed. Gill, 1:19.
 19. Marston, *Metamorphosis of Pigmaliions Image*, 38.1–3, sig. B7r.
 20. Day, *English Secretarie*, 87.
 21. Alexander, 'Sidney's Interruptions', 194–5. For another thought-provoking study of the figure of *aposiopesis*, see Sell, 'Terminal Aposiopesis and Sublime Communication'.
 22. Puttenham, *Art of English Poesy*, 252.
 23. Peacham, *Garden of Eloquence*, 198.
 24. Drayton, *Englands Heroicall Epistles*, 'Henry Howard, Earle of Surrey, to the Lady Geraldine', 241–52, in *Works*, ed. Hebel, 2:283–4; emphasis added.
 25. Sackville, *The Last Part of Mirour for Magistrates*, fol. 136v; emphasis added.
 26. 'The ladie praieth the returne of her lover abiding on the seas', 1–6, in *Tottel's Miscellany*, 172, emphasis added.
 27. Proctor, 'A Proper Sonnet, how Time Consumeth All Things', 1–8, in *Oxford Book of Sixteenth Century Verse*, ed. Chambers, 149, emphasis added.
 28. Wyatt, XCIX.1–12, in *Complete Poems*, ed. Rebholz, 134–5, emphasis added.
 29. Sidney, *Astrophil and Stella*, Song 4.1–12, in *Poems*, ed. Ringler, 210, emphasis added.
 30. Booth, 'Shakespeare's Language', 3.
 31. Shakespeare, Richard III, 5.5.131–40, in *Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Greenblatt, 590–1.

32. Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, 1.2.137–44, in *Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Greenblatt, 2888.
33. Puttenham, *Art of English Poesy*, 250.
34. Daniel, *Delia*, sonnet 42.9–14, in *Poems and a Defence of Rhyme*, ed. Sprague, 31.
35. The expression 'turbulent inner monologue' was first used in this context in Houston, *Shakespearean Sentences*, 97. Very similar to Houston's own are the words with which Kermode described Hamlet's soliloquy cited at the beginning of this chapter (1.2.138–53), to which he refers as a 'new way of representing turbulent thinking' (*Shakespeare's Language*, 16).
36. Sidney, *Astrophil and Stella*, sonnet 33.1–5, in *Poems*, ed. Ringler, 181, emphases added. Punctuation has been altered, and Q1-Q2 variants such as '(woe me)' in line 1 preferred over Ringler's text.
37. Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. Hamilton, III.12.20, emphasis added.
38. Charney, 'Shakespeare's Unpoetic Poetry'.
39. Lope de Vega, *Los locos de Valencia*, 1.6–9.