

The ethics of speech play an important role in the construction and representation of virtue in medieval texts. Much has been written on the complex relationship between speech and sainthood in hagiographies, but its afterlife in Renaissance drama remains under explored. These changing oral dynamics were played out on the post-Reformation English stage, and they reflected a shifting theological stance toward female virtue. In medieval hagiographies, virtuous speech and silence was characteristic of holy women. The ways in which this legacy was usurped by post-Reformation writers, and to what purpose, now merits further attention.

My project would focus on the influence that medieval texts exerted in Renaissance plays, both through direct textual references, and through subtler assertions. Central to this would be Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, specifically the 'Physician's Tale' and 'Cleric's Tale'. Both explore the relationship between 'saint-like' female virtue and speech. A study of 'good' language in these tales has yet to be conducted, and the way that the ethics of utterance evolved in the Renaissance plays that reference them has yet to be fully understood. These dramas include Thomas Middleton's *The Lady's Tragedy* (or *Second Maiden's Tragedy*) (1611), and Thomas Dekker's collaborative work *Patient Grissil* (1603). The manuscript resources at Cambridge, particularly MS 275, 'Legends of Saints', in the Parker Library (which includes, among other things, Petrarch's 'Historia Griseldis') would also be invaluable for this research. Alongside this, I would also consider hagiographies that appear to inform the fashioning of female characters in these plays, such as the account of the life of St Agnes from William Caxton's English translation of the *Legenda Aurea*.

Scholars such as Sandy Bardsley have explored late medieval female utterance from a gendered perspective (2006); and Carla Mazzio has examined the negative theological associations of late medieval inarticulateness in Renaissance culture, focusing specifically upon the differences between Protestant and Catholic conceptions of eloquence (2009). I will frame the revival of medieval texts within the cultural context of the early seventeenth century, conducting at least part of my analysis through the lens of contemporary linguistic theories of speech. Linguistic approaches (such as that of Steven Pinker (2007), for example) highlight the interdependent relationship between the ethics of language and the society in which it operates. This approach would follow on from recent developments in the field, drawing attention to the under-examined ways that linguistic models can illuminate the connections between history and text.

This thesis could potentially develop beyond post-Reformation drama and its sources to other oral and textual forms of social influence. Discourses on speech in sermons and

religious tracts from both the medieval period and the Renaissance may shed further light on the complex relationship between the ethics of speech and sexuality. The impact of the Reformation on this equation raises important questions about the broader connections between history and text, and promises to further elucidate the frequently underestimated legacy of medieval literature.