

Translator's Introduction

My ears have not yet drunk a hundred words
Of thy tongue's uttering, yet I know the sound.
—William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*

After some hesitation, Romeo takes a risk—he speaks up out of the darkness and presents himself to Juliet. Rather than introduce himself by name, however, he alerts Juliet to his presence in the very act of speaking, or, more precisely, through the sound of his voice, by which she in turn recognizes him.

The singularity of the voice, which Shakespeare foregrounds in this well-known scene, is the essential point of departure for Cavarero's text. She tries to rethink the relation between speech and politics—announced in Aristotle's formula whereby man's nature as a political animal [*zoon politikon*] is bound up with man's characterization as that animal that has speech [*zoon logon echon*]¹—by focusing her attention on the embodied uniqueness of the speaker as it is manifested in that speaker's voice, addressed to another.¹ In this way, she radically departs from more traditional conceptions of what constitutes “political speech,” such as the signifying capacity of the speaker, the communicative capacity of discourse, or the semantic content of a given statement. As in her earlier work, Cavarero continues to develop and deepen a number of themes foregrounded by Hannah Arendt, who asserts in *The Human Condition* that what matters in speech is not signification or “communication” but rather the fact that “in acting and speaking, men show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human world.”² From Arendt's perspective, speech is not a mere faculty that distinguishes man from animal, or a general capacity for signification that allows human beings to communicate with one another; rather, speech is first and foremost a privileged way in which the speaker actively, and therefore politically, distinguishes him- or herself to others. By focusing her attention on the uniqueness of the speaker—as it is manifested in the unique sound of the voice—Cavarero is able to offer in *For More than One Voice* a novel ac-

count of political speech that takes Arendt's reflections one step further. Refining the radically phenomenological perspective that Arendt puts forth in her work, Cavarero locates the political sense of speech in the singularity of the speaker's voice, the acoustic emission that emits from mouth to ear. For Cavarero this politics emerges from "the reciprocal communication of voices," wherein what comes to the fore is above all the embodied singularity of the speakers in relation to others, no matter what they say. Her text is ambitious in its theoretical scope; I will try to say something about that particular ambition in what follows.

This is the fourth book by Cavarero to be translated into English; the trajectory of her thought has been introduced to an English-speaking audience in different ways in each of the previous three.³ So when Cavarero invited me to provide a preface to this volume, I decided that instead of providing an introductory overview, I wanted to contribute an essay of affinity and propinquity. Perhaps because she and I share a fondness for Shakespeare, or perhaps because Verona has been for me the scene of many memorable conversations with her, I want to preface—and at the same time take the risk of engaging with—her work by way of the balcony scene from *Romeo and Juliet*. For Cavarero's text strives—not unlike Shakespeare's nocturnal scene—to amplify the resonance of voices in order to open the possibility of a different mode of political existence.

The tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet* is above all a tragedy of the name, of designation, *semantike*.⁴ The story or plot of Romeo and Juliet—the "death mark'd love" of the two young lovers—would not be what it is without this more general tragedy of the name or of naming, which unfolds wherever anyone suffers or dies on account of what they are called. "Civil brawls," as the Prince says in the first scene of Shakespeare's play, "bred of an airy word/By thee, old Capulet and Montague" (I.I.87–88).⁵ Particularly in Shakespeare's theatrical staging of the myth, Romeo and Juliet themselves seem to understand that their story—what is happening to them alone—is also this "other" tragedy of the name into which they too have been "born"—"from forth the fatal loins of these two foes." Juliet, especially, analyzes their predicament in precisely this way during the balcony scene—moving from their names to names in general, from "Montague" to "Rose," from "Romeo" to "love." Indeed, it is this collision of their lives—their desire, their relationship, their interactions—with their names that lies at the source of the tragedy, the heart of its mythos.

However, in the balcony scene—and, in fact, through this very analysis—the tragic myth itself is suspended. For on this scene the essence of the tragedy is exposed, elaborated, and—for the scene's duration at least—superseded by the relation that emerges from the exchange between the two in the context of this exposure. First, and most apparently, what this laying bare of the tragedy's essence in fact reveals is the extent to which the “ancient grudge,” which in principle prohibits the sort of relationship desired by Romeo and Juliet, is rooted in the enmity of the name (“’tis but thy name that is my enemy,” says Juliet [2.2.38]). It is this enmity that separates them, so to speak, or—within the ambit of the tragedy—that makes their union impossible. Yet insofar as the balcony scene exposes this violence of the name to interrogation by the lovers, it also serves to suspend the tragic myth. Put differently, although this scene is clearly essential to the tragedy—for what would the story mean without this encounter, without Romeo and Juliet's reciprocal profession of desire?—in Shakespeare's theatrical rendering, the scene's essentiality and its centrality lie at the same time in its power to interrupt or forestall the play's trajectory.

Indeed, if one takes seriously Aristotle's suggestion that *mythos* (“plot” or “story”) is the most essential part of tragedy, then Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* at once demonstrates the authority of the tragic myth while at the same time suspending its power through its theatrical staging. The play has often been called Shakespeare's most “classical” tragedy, precisely because (among other features, like “fortune”) it is the one play by Shakespeare in which the plot or story seems to transcend the dramatic script⁶—yet it turns out that precisely where tragedy as myth in the classical sense seems strongest in Shakespeare's drama, the power of a theatrical scene to interrupt and undo that tragic myth is most essential; namely, in the balcony scene, which has in fact come to stand (after Shakespeare) as *the* scene of the story.

How might the balcony scene—as a theatrical resonance of two voices—work to disrupt tragedy and its mythic trajectory? And how might that disruption be recuperated from Shakespeare's drama in a way that gestures toward a different definition of the political sphere, such as the one proposed by Arendt when she suggests that theatrical mimesis is “the political art *par excellence*”?⁷ As Cavarero says toward the end of the present text, perhaps this drama authorizes us to imagine the story of Romeo and Juliet without its tragic end, to “imagine another story for the community of lovers” within a public sphere whose boundaries are not determined by “what” the lovers are called, and that does not demand their death or separation.

Let me recall Shakespeare's staging of their encounter, which departs sharply from the earlier, lyrical (that is, nontheatrical) renderings of the story, on which Shakespeare seems to have relied for the plot. First—in contrast to Arthur Brook's 1562 lyrical translation of the tale, and the immediate Italian sources from which it is taken—in Shakespeare's rendering, the lovers do not see one another. And this lack of reciprocal visibility means, of course, that the lovers do not encounter each another simultaneously, as in the earlier poetic versions, where they spy one other at the same moment. Instead, Juliet is seen by Romeo well before Romeo, in turn, reveals himself to Juliet by speaking up. In fact, the scene (as it is transposed into the theater by Shakespeare) comes to be structured dramatically on this marked disjunction between seeing and speaking, between the visual and the acoustic. Surprisingly, Shakespeare's staging of the tale does not merely expose the lovers to each other's gaze (or to the gaze of the spectators), as one might expect when a myth moves from lyrical epic to a theatrical tragedy. Rather, in transferring the tale to the theater, Shakespeare's scene (and indeed much of the play) works under the cover of night, in a penumbra that frustrates the primacy of spectacle—a primacy that classically divides theatrical tragedy from lyrical poetry. Consequently, and remarkably, what comes to the fore in this scene is not a privileging of visibility but above all the spoken exchange between the lovers. At stake, I will suggest, is not simply a general distinction between verblativity and visuality; rather, it is the way in which speech constitutes action, or *interaction*, in a way that the gaze alone cannot.⁸ After all, it is only when Romeo takes the initiative to move from merely *looking* at Juliet to engaging her in conversation that their relationship emerges. Only when they audibly address one another does the scene become relational.

The emphasis on verblativity in the balcony scene has been read by some critics as a “dramatic equivalent” of Philip Sidney's sonnet sequence *Astrophil and Stella*; or, by other readers like Joel Fineman, as a further instance of Shakespeare's “corruptingly linguistic verbal duplicity,” which opposes the ideal specularization of a sonnet tradition extending back to Petrarch, and to which Sidney belongs.⁹ To avoid confusion, therefore, let me assert from the start that in drawing attention to the *spoken* exchange of the lovers at night, I do not wish to highlight the poetic language of the scene. Rather, I want to underscore very simply that they are *speaking* aloud to one another; the scene is therefore first of all the resonance of two unique voices—what Cavarero calls “the reciprocal communication of voices.”

To be sure, this is an exceptional dialogue. The spoken exchange in fact begins with Romeo's epideictic response to the appearance of Juliet, a response that invokes a disjunction between the act of speaking and the fact of "communicating" or "saying something." From Romeo, we in fact learn that Juliet is speaking before we come to know what she is saying. "She speaks," he tells us, "yet she says nothing. What of that?" (2.2.12). And even when her voice becomes audible to Romeo (and to the audience), Juliet's speech remains enigmatically irreducible to signification. "Ay me," she sighs, letting this vocalization resonate by itself before continuing (2.2.24).

Indeed, when her speech finally—thirty-three lines into the scene—begins to signify in a way that is recognizable to Romeo (and to the audience), it does so only in order to denounce the name and signification more generally. Without knowing he is there, Juliet invokes Romeo's name through the famous apostrophe ("O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo"), calling him beyond his name, or without his title ("refuse thy name" [2.2.33]). In other words, her discourse comes to signification only in order to then call past it; her speech "signifies," it turns out, in order to defy the power of designation itself. The problem, therefore, is not, as Fineman calls it, the duplicity of Shakespeare's language as it revises the idealizing poetic speech of earlier sonneteers. What comes to the fore in the theatrical scene is in fact the spoken suspension of the semantic register.

As everyone familiar with the play knows, the suspension of the tragedy staged by this scene unfolds first of all through Juliet's cold, detached analysis of the disjunction between the name "Romeo" and "that dear perfection which he owes/without that title." Her soliloquy proceeds as a critique not only of the proper name—"Romeo" or "Montague"—but of designation in general—"that which we call a rose/By any other name would smell as sweet." Juliet knows that the name "Romeo" is not who she desires—it names nothing of his body, as she says, nothing "belonging to a man." On the contrary, the problem for Juliet is that the name "Romeo Montague" evokes the uniqueness of the one who carries that name without, however, revealing who he uniquely is. This is, of course, the point of her elaboration: namely, to underscore the separation between Romeo himself—the one she desires—and the name he bears; between who he is and what he is called. Indeed, her desire is made possible by—or perhaps is itself the occasion of—the separation of "who" Romeo is from his name.

On the one hand, therefore, the semantic content of Juliet's speech, as scripted by Shakespeare, serves to foreground the irreducibility of

Romeo himself—the one she desires—to the name “Romeo.” In this sense, Romeo’s and Juliet’s relationship is conditioned on, and is itself the occasion of, the separation of who they are from what they are called.¹⁰

On the other hand, it is precisely this irreducibility of who Romeo is to what he is called that is, so to speak, *mise-en-scène* by the dialogue itself, over and beyond the radical analysis of the name scripted by Shakespeare for Juliet. That is to say, the disjunction between the name and its bearer, between who he is and what he is called, is not only posited philosophically by Juliet as she speaks into the darkness in a kind of virtual monologue (because she speaks to no one in particular, certainly not yet to Romeo who has already told us “’tis not to me she speaks” [2.2.14]). Rather, this separation is enacted or affirmed on the scene itself at the moment when this monologue is broken and becomes dialogue—that is, when it ceases to be a general, philosophical reflection on the name as such and becomes theatrical speech-in-relation, here and now in the dark of night.

For as the audience knows, Juliet’s discourse has in fact found a listener: Romeo himself, who has clandestinely marked her speech at every step (repeating, at each interval, “she speaks, O speak again bright angel,” or “Shall I hear more, or shall I speak at this?” [2.2.25–26, 36]). Of course, in contrast to the audience, or unlike a generalizable “auditor” that might accidentally overhear Juliet’s discourse, Romeo hears himself called by this analysis. To be sure, this appeal could hardly be more ambiguous, for on the one hand, Juliet does not address Romeo directly (“’Tis not to me she speaks”), and, on the other hand, her apostrophe calls out to Romeo beyond, or in spite of, his name—calling him by name (in principle) in order to separate him from it. “Romeo, doff thy name, / And for thy name, which is no part of thee, / Take all myself” (2.2.47–49).

At least, this is how Romeo hears himself called at this moment. And, it is worth noting, he must hear this call like no one else hears it, because this appeal concerns him alone. In other words, Juliet’s call to Romeo beyond his name—insofar as it is heard by Romeo himself—affirms the tension of a desire, of a relation, that is theirs alone. In fact, the absolute singularity of their relation is precisely what the theatricality of the scene presupposes, even as it is staged for a larger audience. In other words, it is as if we (the audience) and not Romeo are the real eavesdroppers, listening in on a private discourse without ever possibly hearing it as they themselves do.

But how, then, can Romeo respond to such an address, one that calls to him by name by at the same time calling him beyond his name? How can he answer, so to speak, as himself and not just as "Romeo"?

"I take thee at thy word," he answers, "call me but love and I'll be new baptized" (2.2.49–50). His response is keen: in taking Juliet at her word, he refuses to identify himself by a proper name, because "love" is not a name with which one could be christened; rather, it is the name of the phenomenon in question, so to speak, whereby one becomes separable from one's name, one's family, one's genealogy. Indeed, it is almost as if Romeo only comes to see himself as separable from his name, from his father, when he hears himself called that way by Juliet. In other words, only through the spoken interaction of the scene does Romeo see that it is possible to answer as "himself" and not as "Romeo."

Juliet, for her part, is understandably startled by the unexpected voice that emits from the darkness—a darkness that she (or Shakespeare) once more underlines: "What man art thou," she asks, "that thus bescreen'd in night/So stumblest upon my counsel?" (2.2.52–53).

Romeo's reply is, once again, insistently enigmatic: "By a name/I know not how to tell thee who I am: My name, dear saint, is hateful to myself/Because it is an enemy to thee/Had I it written I would tear the word" (2.2.48–51). Now, on the surface it would seem that the cleverness of Romeo's response—both his refusal to identify himself by any name, and his more radical insistence that who he is cannot be revealed by what he is called—affirms his agreement with Juliet. In other words, the semantic content of his words, scripted by Shakespeare, succinctly expresses the separation of his name from who he is.

However, the expression of this separation does not simply occur at the semantic level of Juliet's or Romeo's speech—that is, at the level that can be read on the page of Shakespeare's text or cited by me here. Rather, it occurs more precisely, and more forcefully, in the vocalized utterance, in Romeo's resonant appeal to Juliet. Or, better, it occurs through the emergence of a singular relation that this convocation at once affirms and brings into being on the scene. For when Romeo says, "by a name I know not how to tell thee who I am," he is not simply communicating to Juliet, through this enigmatic claim, that he agrees with her analysis of the name in general. He is not, in other words, simply declaring—in the content of his discourse—"yes, you are right Juliet, no name can reveal who anyone is." On the contrary, what Romeo professes here regards himself alone—

in his relation to Juliet; that is, he refuses, in the very act of speaking to her here and now, to name to her who he himself is. What is heard by Juliet at this moment is therefore not simply a random or impersonal agreement with her thesis regarding the general heterogeneity of a name to its bearer. Instead, she hears *this* man “thus bescreen'd in night” say, “by a name I know not how to tell *thee* who *I* am.”

What she hears, finally, is a singular voice—which, as it happens, is one that she recognizes. “My ears have not yet drunk a hundred words/Of thy tongue's uttering,” she exclaims, “yet I know the sound./Art thou not Romeo and a Montague?” (2.2.58–60). She thus identifies him by the unique timbre of his voice alone, without being able to see his face or hear him say his name. Indeed, she identifies him by his voice in spite of the fact that his voice pronounces words that explicitly renounce such identification.

What Romeo's enigmatic refusal to present himself by name produces, therefore, is a scene in which the singularity of his voice—in the act of speaking to Juliet here and now—confounds and defeats what is ostensibly the very problem at hand; that is, the name's powerlessness to reveal or to represent the one who bears it. The “uttering” of Romeo's tongue, as it is heard by Juliet, thus enacts the separation of the name “Romeo” from the one who speaks, allowing Juliet to recognize who is speaking there in the darkness, in spite of the fact that this speaker does not identify himself by name.

What finally opposes the tragedy of the name, therefore—what really subverts it, I think—is not, as is often claimed, Juliet's theoretical appeal to a “dear perfection,” to some “Romeo-ness” that is not reducible to any title or appellation. Rather what radically suspends the tragedy of the name is the scene itself; that is, the audible manifestation of Romeo's uniqueness through his voice, his active communication of himself to her *hic et nunc*—as Cavarero would say, “it is the embodied uniqueness of the speaker and his convocation of another voice.”

Or, better, the scene suspends the tragedy by affirming their singularity (and the singularity of their relationship) through their spoken interaction.¹¹ Although this is a singularity that at some level resists appellation, it can be manifested through their reciprocal convocation. Indeed, what this convocation makes clear is the extent to which the vocal sphere of the interactive scene is, so to speak, broader than the sphere of the name—the acoustic resonance of their voices, as they are heard here and now, exceeds the words they utter. “When the register of speech is totalized,” writes Cavarero, “for instance, when it is identified with a system of language of

which the voice would be a mere function—it is indeed inevitable that the vocal emission not headed for speech is nothing but a remainder.” However, “rather than a mere leftover,” she continues, “what is really at stake is an originary excess.”

This excess is, in fact, what the scene opens up. Put another way, the spoken interaction of the two lovers—the simple fact that they call out to one another in the darkness—is coextensive with a scene that both affirms their relation and at the same time bestows on it a new sense. What their very interaction makes possible—at least for the scene’s duration—is thus a kind of alternative political space whereupon the central question is not “what” the actors are called, or even what they say to one another, but rather “who is speaking?”¹²

After all, it is clear that Juliet desires Romeo not because of what he says; on the contrary, his words fail to convince her. (He speaks too much like “the numbers that Petrarch flowed in,” says Mercutio at a certain point [2.4.40].) For when Romeo starts to profess his love by swearing on the moon, on himself, and so on, Juliet admonishes him, “do not swear,” in a manner that expresses a typically Shakespearean blurring of vow and perjury (“Yet if thou swear’st,” Juliet says, “Thou mayst prove false. At lovers’ perjuries,/They say, Jove laughs” [2.2.91–93]). From a rhetorical perspective, we might conclude more generally from Juliet’s remarks that persuasion here has little to do with what is said, with the conventional poetics of lovers’ oaths or of refined sonnets, and everything to do with who is saying it—everything to do, that is, with the relationship between this speaker and this listener.

“Thou knowest the mask of night is on my face,” says Juliet, “Else would a maiden blush bepaint my cheek/For that which thou hast heard me speak tonight” (2.2.85–87). But of course what this overt reference to the masking of the face makes clear is that in the end, what cannot be masked are their voices. Everything else can be masked—their faces, their gestures, even the words they use; words can, after all, designate everything and its opposite, through the trope of oxymoron that Romeo himself practices in his first lines in the play (“O brawling love, O loving hate/O any thing, of nothing first create” [I.I.174–75]). Hence Juliet’s inherent mistrust of Romeo’s vows. Unlike his words, however, Romeo’s voice—whatever it says—inevitably communicates one thing: the embodied uniqueness of one who emits it.¹³

It turns out, in other words, that over and beyond the words put

down by William Shakespeare, the act of speaking first and foremost reveals the speaker, communicating above all the one who speaks to the one who listens. Obviously, as Cavarero's work shows, this happens on every scene of spoken interaction, not just this highly idiosyncratic one involving a balcony from Shakespeare's play. Indeed, as Arendt articulates it, this kind of active revelation of oneself in word and deed is what defines the space of interaction, or what Cavarero calls the "local." Such spaces are not defined by the "space" on which they are played out; rather, this "space of interaction" is what is created wherever at least two actors actively communicate themselves to one another, bringing into being a relation between them. In this sense, I think, Shakespeare's play opens itself to a mode of interaction that the work, as a scripted or choreographed production, cannot fully contain or govern.

Thus the balcony scene not only posits—analytically, discursively, philosophically—the suspension of the tragic association of the name with its bearer through Juliet's famous speech, and Romeo's enigmatic response. Brilliant as these lines are, the power of the scene to suspend the tragedy and subvert the force of the name is nevertheless irreducible to what is said—no matter how radical Romeo and Juliet's discourse is. Rather, over and beyond the scripted language, the scene performs, through the resonance of the lovers' very voices, the suspension of the tragedy of the name. Or, put differently, the scene not only describes but moreover actively affirms the separation of the name "Romeo" from who Romeo is—above all, through his relation to Juliet.

Surprisingly, therefore, the fact that the balcony scene suspends or interrupts the tragedy of the name is not attributable simply to the supreme refinement of Shakespeare's language, to the exquisite sophistication of Juliet's monologue, or to the shrewd response that it elicits from Romeo. Put another way, as a result of Romeo's revelation of himself to Juliet by speaking up, under the cover of night, it not only becomes possible to actively separate "Romeo" from his name, but it now becomes possible to separate their interaction from Shakespeare's language, from what Juliet and Romeo say to each other. For what finally emerges from the profundity of the verbal exchange scripted by William Shakespeare is a scene whereupon a singular relationship is enacted and affirmed—one in which what matters is not only what is said, but rather who is saying it.¹⁴ In fact, in spite of the memorable lines that Shakespeare has left us, what Juliet

and Romeo do and say to each other is finally less crucial, as far as the tragedy is concerned, than the fact that they reveal who they are to one another in spite of what they say. It is the priority of this revelation that distinguishes Shakespeare's version of the story.

In other words, not only is the act of speaking not reducible here to communication-as-signification, but also, precisely because of this irreducibility, the act of speaking communicates above all the one who speaks to those who listen. In this way, the tragedy of the name is suspended by something that, so to speak, cannot be scripted: that is—in the first instance—the spoken interaction of the two lovers' voices, and—in the second instance—the relation that this convocation brings into being and affirms here and now. For this vocalization, like the relation it makes possible, cannot be fully inscribed or archived by any mark or sign.

Now, in a simple sense, Juliet's recognition of Romeo's voice is obviously scripted in advance by Shakespeare in the lines "my ears have not yet drunk a hundred words of thy tongues' uttering/And yet I know the sound." Yet it is quite apparent (especially here) that Shakespeare's text depends in an essential way on the prior fact, as it were, of the singularity of Romeo's voice. For it is first of all the singularity of this speaker's voice, and therefore the singularity of this speaker, that is manifested in the sonority of Romeo's utterance. The fact that who is speaking is singular (even before being identifiable by name), and the fact that this singularity can be manifested in that speaker's voice, is finally the only thing in this scene that Shakespeare must take for granted. And it is precisely this "vocal phenomenology of uniqueness" (to use Cavarero's phrase) that Shakespeare exploits to such great effect.

It is a given that Romeo communicates first of all himself in the act of speaking, just as it is taken for granted that Juliet can recognize Romeo through his voice; and these givens turn out to be the ontological conditions of possibility for the scene itself. The "relational character of speech" (as Cavarero puts it), rooted as it is in the singularity of each speaker, which makes itself manifest in the uniqueness of their voice, is the only thing that Shakespeare's scene must perforce take for granted as its ontological horizon. The name, the family, civil strife, the law of the enemy—all of these things can be, and are, subject to radical question and revision in Shakespeare's play. But what the play, like all theater and all political life, cannot suspend is the fact that speaking up implies that someone is re-

vealed, here and now, through the sound of their voice. This is true whether one is being heard for the first time, or whether the voice is familiar—as Romeo's is to Juliet.

Put quite simply, Shakespeare's text depends on the fact of Romeo's unique voice—that it can be and is recognizable to Juliet as a manifestation of Romeo's singularity beyond his name and beyond the words he utters.¹⁵ Were this not the case, Shakespeare could have set the scene under the harsh light of the sun, with the sort of reciprocal visibility represented in Sidney's or Brooke's lyrical rendering. For even if it were played under the bright light of day, the meaning of the dialogue—the call for Romeo to doff his name—would not have changed. But the point is that in bringing the scene into being, Shakespeare needed the cover of night. Night here is not a mere scenographic choice. Rather, visibility is eclipsed because Romeo's voice—unseen, and therefore unidentifiable through the gaze—is the immediate, acoustic revelation of that embodied uniqueness that Juliet wanted to separate from his name.

The active revelation of who Romeo is to Juliet—embodied, as Cavarero would say, with a voice that is like no other—in fact responds to her desire for his body, which is, as she herself indicates, separable from his name. The name "Romeo," after all, is "not hand, nor foot, nor arm"—much less the singular flesh that she desires. Romeo's voice, on the other hand, does emit from his body; and in its acoustic resonance, his "tongue" reaches her "ears." Clearly, the singularity that Romeo's voice manifests is first of all an embodied singularity. Obviously, what Juliet desires is not merely the philosophical claim of her discourse—namely, that there is uniqueness, or that human beings are all unique. What she desires is this one, who lives, breathes, and speaks.

Again, as Cavarero notes repeatedly, this embodied uniqueness can be perceived visibly as well. When Romeo and Juliet see each other for the first time, their immediate appearance to one another explicitly carries with it this recognition of embodied singularity dissociated from the name (as Juliet says, on learning from the nurse that Romeo is a Montague: "to early seen unknown, and known too late" [1.5.138]).¹⁶ However, from Cavarero's point of view, the acoustic exchange of voices has the value of being more "bodily" than the gaze. In other words, from her perspective, the difference between the gaze or face-to-face encounter and a verbal or vocal exchange serves to highlight how the acoustic sphere might provide a more fruitful

phenomenological position from which to radically reconfigure a metaphysical-political tradition going back to Plato that is rooted in theory (and a whole lexicon constructed on sight, contemplation, intellectual detachment, and so forth) by opening an ontological horizon founded on the material, contextual relation of embodied unique existents. The theoretical articulation of this ontological horizon—rooted in the phenomenal relationality of the voice—is, as the reader will note, the central aim of her argument in this book. I will say more about this aim momentarily.

However, although her position, as she articulates it, certainly has the merit of providing a radical critique of the metaphysical tradition of political philosophy, as well as of many twentieth-century critics of this tradition (including Levinas), there is perhaps another way to recuperate the difference between a visual face-to-face encounter and a vocal exchange. Returning to *Romeo and Juliet*, what could be emphasized is that the revelation of embodied uniqueness through the voice carries with it an interactive sense that a visible encounter does not. For one can look upon, or be looked upon by, another without acting or interacting, and therefore without the possibility of any active relationship. (Romeo could have simply continued to admire Juliet's physical appearance in the window, as he in fact does for the first part of the scene, without ever speaking up.) If, as Cavarero notes following Hannah Arendt, the human condition of plurality guarantees an ontological horizon of relationality between unique existents—and if this horizon can be either visual or vocal (although, again, Cavarero privileges the vocal)—then it is also true, following Arendt in a different vein, that without speech, this horizon of relationality remains inactive, unaffirmed, a “brute physical appearance.”¹⁷ In other words, the difference between vocal exchange and a visual face-to-face encounter might also be recuperated—over and beyond the analysis of this difference that Cavarero provides in the following pages—as a way of underscoring the disjunction between (on the one hand) a material, ontological horizon of plurality, a kind of sheer relationality between embodied uniquenesses that simply comes with being alive in the world among others, and (on the other hand) what Arendt calls the “political” space of action, a kind of relation that results from interaction and that gives sense to political existence.

Nowhere is this made clearer in Shakespeare's play than in Romeo's final speech, uttered as he looks upon what he believes to be the dead body of Juliet. Praising her beauty in the same Sidney-esque language with which he praised it when they first met, he here dwells on the fact that she

still appears beautiful in spite of the fact that she can no longer speak (“O my love,/Death that hath suck'd the honey of thy breath/Hath had no power yet upon thy beauty” [5.3.92–93]). Indeed, the commonplace fact that a dead corpse can no longer be heard but can be seen is here employed by Shakespeare as the very disjunction that ultimately kills not only the lovers’ bodies but more importantly ends their relation. For what is peculiar about the deaths of the two lovers, within the context of Shakespeare’s play, is that they die to each other before dying corporally. That is to say, their active relation, the living sense of their interaction, does not expire in the same instance as their bodies (which remain visible, tangible, kissable)—but rather expires along with the lack of breath or voice with which to speak, or along with the death of interaction. Each sees the other dead, making clear that what is at stake in death is not simply the body’s demise, but rather the severing of an active relation, which is marked explicitly in *Romeo and Juliet* as the impossibility of ever hearing the other’s voice again.

Put differently, the relationality of the balcony scene—and the tension of desire between Juliet and Romeo that runs throughout the play itself—is rooted in the embodied singularity of the two lovers without, however, being reducible to their embodiedness. Romeo’s voice, through which Juliet recognizes “who” he is in the darkness of the balcony scene, clearly emits from this actor (who passes air through his vocal cords) toward Juliet who hears it. But this very emission that goes out from Romeo to Juliet means that although their spoken interaction is ontologically grounded in their embodied uniqueness, it has, so to speak, a relational sense that exceeds its sheer physicality. The relational character of the scene does not arise only from the fact that the two actors have a “throat of flesh” or can move their bodies or pass air through their larynx, but moreover from the fact that they speak to one another, from the new relationship (or the new sense for this relationship) that this speech brings into being.

Again, for Cavarero, the difference between the face-to-face and vocal exchange serves chiefly to underscore the embodied materiality of a vocal, relational ontology as a forceful challenge to the disembodied universal claims of metaphysical political theory. Although I agree with this emphasis, I would suggest additionally that this difference might also serve to highlight the rupture or break between a sheer, ontological horizon of embodied relationality (whether visual, vocal, tactile, or olfactory) and what Arendt calls a “political” sphere of relationality that depends on action [*praxis*]. For the vocalized utterance as it is “destined to speech” (to use Cavarero’s phrase) is not solely a manifestation of one’s embodied unique-

ness, although it is also always such a manifestation. Every utterance is moreover an action, which at once manifests one's embodied uniqueness to others in the context of a material, ontological relation here and now and which also initiates, or alters, a relation whose sense exceeds this sheer manifestation of one's corporeal uniqueness. In other words, action—especially vocal utterance—is the way in which the actor affirms and manifests his or her embodied uniqueness, and also inaugurates a new sense for that uniqueness by fostering a relationship whose character is more than solely ontological, but also political. Put formulaically, while it is important to insist with Cavarero (for reasons I will now explain, and which she explains at length) on an ontological horizon of relationality, or plurality, among embodied uniquenesses, it is also important, from my point of view, to bear in mind the extent to which the category of relationality is not solely ontological, but moreover a category that appertains to the political sphere of action as it distinguishes itself from an ontological horizon of embodied plurality.¹⁸

As I indicated at the outset, Cavarero's aim in *For More than One Voice* is deceptively ambitious. It is nothing short of laying the ground—through a radical rethinking of the role of voice in the relation between logos and politics—for an antimetaphysical ontology founded not on the activity of thinking, or on abstract entities like Man or Individual or Justice, but rather irremediably rooted in a radically embodied, contextual, relational ontology that takes seriously Arendt's notion of the human condition as a "plurality" of unique existents. Indeed, in a sense, Cavarero's insistence on the importance of providing the theoretical or discursive framework for such an ontological grounding is even more deep-seated than Arendt's own. For as Cavarero puts it, only by redefining the ontological horizon itself—which, for her, means the obligatory work not only of "deconstructing" the central figures of metaphysical ontology but moreover of recuperating an entirely different sense for those figures—can a new form of political existence emerge.¹⁹ She thus proceeds to disfigure the central theme that has defined the bond between ontology and politics since Plato—namely logos—by focusing on the theme of the voice as that literal phenomenon that undoes the metaphysical figuration of the term *logos* itself, because what is undeniable in the sound of each voice is the embodied, relational uniqueness of each existent. For Cavarero, politics should now inscribe itself in this disfigured, antimetaphysical, material, contextual, relational ontology.

It is precisely because her aim is so ambitious that Cavarero argues so forcefully for the irreducibility of this ontological horizon, this plurality of embodied, unique existents. Indeed, the reader will note that Cavarero insists on the corporeality of the voice in order to “return” speech to the body—that is, in order to reverse the philosophical tendency to subordinate speech (as in the semantic destiny of the term *logos* itself) to a mute, immaterial order of signification. Her reading of Plato, her analysis of the figure of the Sirens, of opera, and of biblical texts convincingly demonstrates that “the voice and body reinforce one another” in the western tradition. And Cavarero makes use of this inextricable bond between voice and body to, as it were, rescue both the voice and the body from the figuration to which they have been subjected by the politicophilosophical tradition of the west.²⁰ Wherever Plato makes use of the voice or the body as a figure that valorizes an order of “signifieds” that is neither bodily nor sonorous, Cavarero seeks out the unique bodies beneath the figuration, the singular sounds of a plurality of voices that disturb the mute working of the mind. If the Sirens, according the history of their figuration, have been robbed of both their “original” bodily shape and their voice, then Cavarero aims to rescue “future” Sirens from the fate to which this figuration would condemn them (and, implicitly, women in general).

It could thus be said that the recuperation of the bodily act of speech plays an essential role in Cavarero’s analysis of the voice insofar as this bodily voice is, for her, not a figure. Indeed, not only is the voice absolutely not figural for Cavarero, it in fact turns out to be a central phenomenon through which the figural impulse of metaphysics can be subverted. She proceeds in *For More than One Voice* to read various figurations of the bodily voice in western philosophy, music, and literature in order to, finally, rescue the voice from figuration in general. The voice, for her, is stubbornly, insistently, unabashedly bodily—it is the voice of this one, this throat of flesh, heard by this other. Her insistence on the fleshy nature of the voice may strike some readers as too essentialist, which is why I want to stress that this avowal should be understood in the context of her broad, highly ambitious reworking of a politicophilosophical tradition that seeks to eliminate the bodily singularity of every existent in the name of a universal, figural abstraction.

Much of *For More than One Voice* is thus devoted to overturning “the old metaphysical strategy that subordinates speech to thought” through the articulation of an entirely different ontological horizon that takes the acoustic resonance of a plurality of unique voices as its phenomenological beginning. Cavarero writes:

An antimetaphysical strategy, like mine, aiming to valorize an ontology of uniqueness finds in the voice a decisive—indeed, obligatory—resource. The point is not simply to revocalize logos. Rather, the aim is to free logos from its visual substance, and to finally mean it as sonorous speech—in order to listen, in speech itself, for the plurality of singular voices that convoke one other in a relation which is not simply sound, but above all resonance.

Cavarero's affirmation of the ontological status of a material, relational, contextual plurality of unique existents, as she herself points out, has something in common with contemporary philosophers like Giorgio Agamben and Jean-Luc Nancy, for whom a radical response to the political-philosophical tradition of the west implies the articulation of a "relational" ontology of plurality and uniqueness.²¹ She writes:

The political, for Nancy, corresponds precisely to the *in* of this being in common. Favoring, particularly in less recent works, the term *community*, he in fact grounds politics in the *with*, the *among*, the *in*—which corresponds in Arendt's lexicon to the in-between—that is, in any particle that alludes to the original, ontological relation inscribed in the plurality of singular beings. Politics is the bond—a bond inscribed in the ontological status of singularity, insofar as this implies plurality and relation. These three categories of uniqueness, plurality, and relation—which generate each other—determine the coincidence of ontology and politics.

Significantly, however, even as she affirms her affinity with this line of thought, she also criticizes Nancy for being too quick to conflate ontology and politics. "For Nancy, this coincidence [between ontology and politics] is absolute. . . . Politics consists immediately in the given relation of the ontological condition." For Cavarero, unlike Nancy, the articulation of an antimetaphysical, relational, embodied ontology of plural uniqueness is a necessary condition for rethinking politics—but it is not sufficient for the emergence of such a politics. Instead, she claims (following Arendt) that "ontology and politics are in a necessary relation, but they are not the same thing; they do not coincide." Symptomatically, what accounts for the difference between ontology and politics is, in fact—for both Arendt and Cavarero—action. Action is something more than, or other than, simply "being"—it is its "consequence and response." "Without action in a shared space of reciprocal exhibition," writes Cavarero, "uniqueness remains a mere ontological given—the given of an ontology that is not able to make itself political." In short, the point I wish to draw attention to here is the fact that—even as Cavarero repeatedly and methodically articulates an antimetaphysical ontology from which a new politics might emerge—for her, this ontology does not fully result in, or coincide with, politics in the absence of action.

Given her remarks in the context of her discussion of Nancy's work, it is therefore curious that Cavarero's own analysis of the voice—which, naturally, is the chief focus of the book—does not push itself toward ulterior implications for the notion of action that she herself invokes as the category that separates the ontological from the political. In *For More than One Voice*, the act of speaking or vocalization is employed primarily as a “resource” with which to “valorize an (antimetaphysical) ontology of uniqueness” that radically subverts the classical definition of logos in relation to politics. Vocalization is not conceived by Cavarero as a “political” action, but rather as a phenomenon through which an antimetaphysical, relational ontology might find its most forceful articulation.²² Given the methodological and philosophical aims of the book, not to mention inevitable limits of scope in a project so ambitious, this is perfectly comprehensible. However, I'd like briefly to imagine at least one way in which conceiving vocalization as action might produce an important critical purchase on the disjunction or noncoincidence of ontology and politics.

In her account of action, Arendt is careful to point out through explicit reference to the voice that what is essential to action is not solely the fact that it is rooted in the body of the singular actor, or that it reveals the embodied singularity of the actor; rather, she adds, what is essential to action is moreover the capacity of this embodied, singular actor to initiate or begin something new.²³ Arendt even goes so far as to claim that this capacity for beginning is made possible by the actor's embodied uniqueness, but yet not fully conditioned or determined by that actor's body, or his/her material, contextual, ontological relation to others. In other words, the capacity for action emerges from, but at some point exceeds, the “human condition” of materiality, plurality—what Arendt calls “worldliness.”²⁴ She makes this point when she argues that action (unlike “labor” or “work”) “is not forced upon us by necessity . . . [action] may be stimulated by the presence of others whose company we wish to join, but it is never conditioned by them; its impulse springs from the beginning that came into the world when we were born and to which we respond by beginning something new on our own initiative.”²⁵ This “impulse” to appear, or to reveal oneself in word or deed, is the sine qua non of politics, over and beyond the ontological horizon from which it emerges. Although such a politics clearly corresponds to (and depends on) the relational ontology that Cavarero articulates in *For More than One Voice*, in Arendt's account the act (especially the act of speaking) is an “initiative” that emerges out of, and is distinct from, the ontological horizon of the human condition.

"Action," put differently, is not a given—like the sheer fact of the voice's singularity or the uniqueness of one's own embodiment. Being born with "a voice like no other" does not, in the end, guarantee or determine the actions performed by that singular voice. On the contrary, as Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* makes clear, such action can by no means be taken for granted; rather, it always entails a certain risk, or initiative on the part of the agents themselves. It is worth remembering, after all, that Romeo and Juliet risk their lives by speaking to one another—not just because of "what" they say, or because they are subject to policing or censorship, but because "speaking up" in this context is tantamount to a relationship. "Bondage is hoarse," says Juliet, "and may not speak aloud" (2.2.160), expressing perfectly the essential bond between silence and oppression, between the voice and freedom, that hangs over their exchange. Obviously, their spoken interaction is already—as soon as Romeo makes a sound—an act of transgression; as Juliet reminds him, "the place is death considering who thou art/If any of my kinsman find thee here" (2.2.64–65). Romeo's voice—his act of speaking up ("shall I hear more, or shall I speak at this?")—is inseparable from this risk. It is not simply what he says to Juliet that puts them in danger, but the very usage of his voice—a usage that almost got him killed by Tybalt earlier in the play, when the Capulet recognized Romeo's voice ("This by his voice should be a Montague/ Fetch me my rapier" [1.5.53–54]).

The risk of speaking up is, finally, inseparable from the freedom that such action might bring about. For using one's voice—to sing, to tell a story, to soothe a child—is not only an essential phenomenon that reveals the ontological horizon described by Cavarero in the following pages; it is, moreover, often (regardless of whether the speaker is aware) a risk that adheres to the radical contingency of action.

What if Romeo had not spoken up, but merely admired Juliet's form while listening to her discourse? Ontologically, the horizon would be the same; politically, however, his actions made all the difference. After all, nothing within the tragic myth (before Shakespeare) guaranteed, governed, or predicted what Romeo's utterance would bring about—namely, a scene of speaking in which the voice itself, in all of its fragility, confounds the limits and conditions of its own resonance.