

## The Truth in Hearing

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In Lessing's play "Emilia Galotti", the main characters all tend to rely most on their sense of hearing to confirm the validity and truth of a situation. Claudia is perhaps the best figure to display this characteristic. She alone brings up the notion that we can trust a person's tone of voice in judging a situation. Other characters, like the Prince and Marinelli, question the relationship between truth and hearing because of their generally suspicious and doubtful attitudes. The two types of sound in relation to human beings exemplified in this play are projected and perceived sound. Perceived sound is any sort of sound that will stir up certain emotions within a listener. On the opposite end, projected sound takes the form of the tone in a person's voice. When a listener hears the speaker's tone of voice, he is bound to a certain amount of empathy, which in due influences his own emotions. Lessing, however, did not make every instance so clear as to be obvious. There are numerous occasions throughout the play when characters will doubt the validity of hearing in making correct judgments. Even more questionable is the importance of sight in perceiving truth and its relationship to hearing. The main characters in this play exhibit a connection between their emotions and sense of hearing that always provide the greatest assurance of truth.

A character's tone of voice always gives away his emotions. As we will see, even if the character is stating a fact, rather than an opinion, we can still interpret it by listening to the emotion that drives the statement. In act II, scene 4, Claudia explains to Odoardo that the Prince shows a particular interest in Emilia, when she says, "[The Prince] Seemed so entranced with her gaiety and wit (...) Has spoken of her beauty with such high praise" (92). Immediately Odoardo questions Claudia's tone by saying, "High Praise? And you tell me

all this in a tone of delight? Oh Claudia! Claudia! Vain, foolish mother!" (92). Odoardo's reaction should not seem surprising. He has long suspected Claudia of ulterior motives for living with Emilia near the royal court, and here she is telling him *in a tone of delight* how entranced the Prince seems with Emilia. Immediately Odoardo's suspicions are confirmed. The truth comes right out of Claudia's mouth, but it is not what she says, rather, how she says it. Her tone of voice indicates that the Prince's remarks flatter her, and that she still may hope to have close relations with the Prince despite Emilia's engagement to Appiani. Odoardo picks up on these emotions and becomes convinced that his suspicions are true. He shows no doubt that her tone of voice is misleading. He acts on Claudia's projected emotions and calls her a vain and foolish mother. If Claudia would make the same statement in a disapproving voice, we can imagine Odoardo would set aside his suspicions, and he certainly would not call her a vain and foolish mother. Projected sound clearly relays the speaker's emotions to the listener, and through these emotions the listener is able to deduce the true intentions of the speaker.

Perceived sound evokes an emotion within the character which proves the character's reliance on hearing to hold true. Instead of someone projecting their emotions through tone of voice, the listener perceives a sound to be real and reacts based on the emotions that arise from it. Emilia becomes frightened and runs quickly back home from church when she perceives the Prince to be following her, as she says, "(...) I finally regained my senses; and heard him come after me; and heard him enter the house with me, climb the stairs with me--" (94). The fact that she is simply imagining these sounds proves all the more, the reliance on hearing as bearing truth. She does not once question her sense in this matter until long after she reacts to it. Emilia *hears* him following her, *hears* him

enter the house, and *hears* him climb the stairs. These sounds evoke a sense of fear in her, and she reacts by pressing forward and not looking back. Claudia means to calm Emilia down by saying the opposite when she points out that "Fear has its own peculiar sense" (94). This implies that Emilia is imagining these footsteps, because she is afraid, and not vice-versa. The fact that Claudia has to point this out shows that Emilia did not perceive it to be this way. While Claudia's point may be valid insofar as to prove that the sounds were just imagined, Emilia's original reaction to flee comes from her fear. If Emilia regains her senses as she says, then truly it was at that point when she begins to *hear* the footsteps trailing behind her. Even when sound is false or imagined, hearing still holds itself to be a reliable and truthful sense for information gathering.

For one reason or another, not all characters continuously support hearing as being the sense to best convey truth. Claudia shows doubts that Emilia's judgment is correct, when she says,

You are too little accustomed to the trifling language of the world. In it a mere courtesy assumes the appearance of true emotion, a flattery that of a protestation, a whim appears as a desire, a desire as a decision. A nothing sounds in this language like everything, and everything in it is as much as nothing.

Common sense tells Claudia that a man of the world, such as the prince, makes flattering remarks to young women all the time, and these remarks should not be taken as truth. However, Claudia is not present at the scene where the Prince is whispering to Emilia, and she does not know if the Prince is speaking from the heart or not. Her suspicions are certainly valid. In the trifling language of the world, people say things that they do not mean. Claudia implies that there is a way of distinguishing true emotions from flattering remarks, and that Emilia is not yet able to do this. The Prince certainly meant what he said

from his heart, as he explains in act I that he "love[s] her and worship[s] her" (85). Emilia reacts as any engaged young woman might do on her wedding day if a prince were to suddenly approach her and express his love for her. These are not just flattering remarks, and whether Emilia can tell the difference or not does not matter in this example, for we know the Prince means what he says. Therefore, the character who is present and listening must be the one to raise doubt in order for a rigorous argument to be made.

Among the most confusing situations where doubt is raised, we find the question raised whether sight or hearing conveys truth best. Referring to Emilia, Marinelli poses a hypothetical situation in which a girl would be abducted while it should appear to be a rescue. The Prince doubts Marinelli's sincerity to pull off such a feat, by saying, "If you knew how to do that, you would not spend so much time talking about it" (103). The Prince seems to deride Marinelli for doing nothing to help the situation, which is why we can imagine the Prince is saying this in a disappointed tone. The Prince therefore wants to believe that Marinelli is doing something to improve the situation. Suddenly the Prince and Marinelli hear shots in the distance, and Marinelli is quick to mock the Prince by saying, "Ha! what was that?--Did I hear right?--Did you not hear a shot also, my lord? and there is another!" (103). Though Marinelli's tone of voice is not mentioned, we can deduce from the context that he is mocking the Prince for not believing him capable of arranging Emilia's abduction. The Prince enters a state of disbelief, saying that he cannot imagine such an event occurring. Marinelli then suggests that the Prince needs to *see* it to believe it, when he says, "Imagine?--Better see it then as an accomplished fact!" (103). Marinelli leaves us to question whether hearing the gun shots is enough to convince the Prince of the reality of the situation or if he really does need to see it. What we should specifically note

in this dialogue is the Prince's state of denial. The Prince seems willing to accept anything Marinelli does to get him Emilia, because up to this point they both have done nothing to improve the situation. By this logic, the Prince would certainly accept the reality of the situation after hearing the two shots and Marinelli's reply. The Prince detects Marinelli's ironical tone and pieces it together with the two gun shots he hears. The emotions felt by the Prince at this moment must convey to him the weight of the truth and catch him off guard. His reaction is of bewilderment and shock, because he is not prepared for the situation at hand. His inner affirmation of the situation combined with being unprepared to deal with it causes his state of denial. While someone in denial may need to *see* confirmation of what is heard, denial itself denotes a reluctance to accept the truth. Therefore, even in this situation, hearing conveys considerable evidence and emotions to the Prince for him to perceive the situation as real and true. His reaction to the truth was denial, but on the inside he acknowledges the situation.

Clearly the sense of hearing is a complex issue, but the characters in "Emilia Galotti" do a convincing job of exhibiting how a real person would react to sound and tone. The characters raise their doubts that hearing is as reliable as it should be, but meanwhile they exhibit natural reflexes to sound, as if their minds must rely on hearing as the one truthful sense. The connection between hearing and emotions is quite strong in both perceived and projected sound. Odoardo seems convinced of his suspicions when Claudia relays her feelings through her tone of voice, and like any perceived sound, Odoardo must accept this tone as truth. Emilia does this with the footsteps, and the Prince does this with the gunshots. When their emotions are affected, the characters assume that hearing provides them with the truth, and that connection is as strong as instinct itself.