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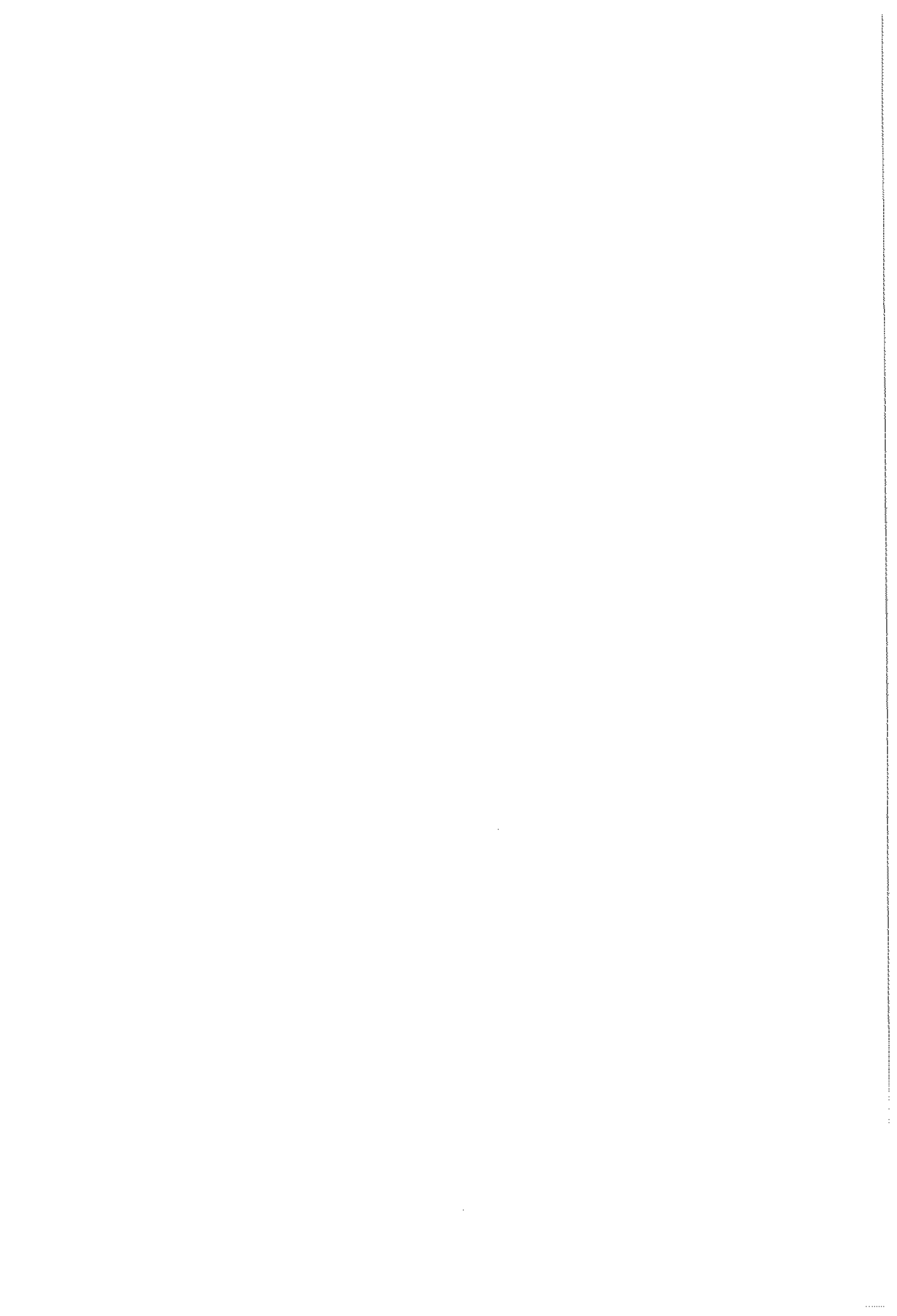

"THEN SHE USURPS UPON ANOTHER´S RIGHT": ELIZABETH CARY´S AUTHORSHIP

Elizabeth Cary (1586-1639) is known as the first woman playwright in England. At the beginning and middle part of the century some critics began to examine her play, *The Tragedy of Mariam, The Fair Queen of Jewry,* written sometime between 1602 and 1605 and published in 1613. Their conclusions were not very positive and in 1924, for example, Witherspoon declares that "the play as a whole is singularly uninspired and deficient in interest" (qtd. in Beilin 1980: 44). Things have changed lately and, though it is still a not very well-known play, in the last twenty years, the play has been re-examined in the light of new points of view that highlight the value of the play and Cary's relevance as a writer. Once we start examining the most recent critical essays on *Mariam*, two different approaches come to light. In this essay, I show the elements that distinguish both approaches and the extent to which both can be combined to shed light on the meaning of Cary's work.

The first critical approach has analysed the play taking into account a biography written by one of her daughters –presumably Anne–, *The Lady Falkland: Her Life*, written between 1643 and 1650[1]. Critics such as Nancy Cotton Pearse, Elaine Beilin, Sandra Fischer, Betty S. Travitsky or Gwynne Kennedy have established a parallelism between the protagonist's life and the author's experience. Though, as Beilin remarks, "to read a play as the expression of an author's inmost feelings and ideas is always to risk

1. The manuscript of this biography can be found in the Archives of the Départemení du Nord in Lille, France. It was edited and published in 1861 by Richard Simpson. Nancy Cotton Pearse also mentions two other biographies written by Lady Georgiana Fullerton, *The Life of Elizabeth Lady Falkland* (London: Burns & Oates, 1883) and by Kenneth B. Murdock, *The Sun at Noon* (New York: Macmillan, 1939), pp. 6-38. Our references to the biography will be indicated as (*Lady Falkland* pp).

misinterpretation" (1980: 45), however, these critics share Beilin's idea that "in the case of the first English play known to be by a woman, playwright and play seem to have an unusually close relationship" (1980: 45). In order to gauge to what extent a parallelism between Cary and her protagonist can be established, some elements of the author's life should be pointed out.

Cary encountered the opposition of her family and society of the time in general to her thirst for knowledge and her fondness for reading and writing since her early adolescence. She learnt to speak and read French, Spanish, Italian, Latin and Hebrew without any teaching assistance, she translated Seneca into English and when she was twelve years old she started reading Calvin's *Institutes*. As the biography states:

> She had read very exceeding much: poetry of all kinds, ancient and modern, in several languages, all that ever she could meet; history very universally, especially all ancient Greek and Roman historians, and chroniclers whatsoever of her own country; and the French histories very thoroughly, of most other countries something, though not so universally; of the ecclesiastical history very much, most especially concerning its chief pastors. Of books treating of moral virtue or wisdom (...) she had read very many when she was young, not without making profit of them. Of the Fathers she had read much (...) Of controversy, it may be said she had read most that has been written... (*Lady Falkland* 268-69).

Cary also faces a familial and social opposition to her conversion to Catholicism which led her to an isolation and pressure exerted by the Protestantism of her family and husband. Such spiritual option is even more subversive in a period when, after the Reformation, the figure of the husband represents the spiritual authority of the familial structure. As Lawerence Stone points out:

> Whether in Anglican or Puritan households, there was, in varying degrees, a new emphasis on the home and on domestic virtues, and this was perhaps the most far-reaching consequence of the Reformation in England. The household was the inheritor of many of the responsibilities of the parish and the Church; the family head was the inheritor of much of the authority and many of the powers of the priest (1979: 105).

Cary's intellectual and religious choices denote a strong personality in a woman that challenges the authority of her family and husband and decides what her options are. However, we must bear in mind that the biography also presents her as the only daughter of Lawrence Tanfield who married her off

with Henry Cary in order to ascend from the upper middle class into the gentry. Cary had eleven children and a very unhappy marriage and she always accepted the only roles for which her parents had brought her up, that is, to be a wife and a mother. From the biography we know that:

> She was very careful and diligent in the disposition of the affairs of her house of all sorts (...); nor was her care of her children less, to whom she was so much a mother that she nursed them all herself (...) To her husband she bore so much respect that she taught her children, as a duty, to love him better than herself (*Lady Falkland* 191-93).

Even after her conversion and complete isolation, Cary never rejected her role as a mother (*Lady Falkland* 221), she always respected her husband (*Lady Falkland* 211-12) and loved her parents "though her mother was never kind to her, especially after her being a Catholic" (*Lady Falkland* 199). But she never abandoned her religious and intellectual interests. Pearse remarks that, after her conversion,

> Lady Falkland turned again to writing, producing a life of Edward II, poems to the Virgin, and lives of saints. She translated Catholic polemics; her translation of Cardinal Perron's reply to king James was publicly burned. Lady Falkland nevertheless kept her rebellious spirit (1977: 606).

However, the biography also refers to Cary's "some occasions of trouble, which afflicted her so much as twice to put her into so deep melancholy that she lost the perfect use of her reason, and was in much danger of her life" (*Lady Falkland* 195). Beilin mentions that Cary's problems were probably due to "an early attraction and final conversion to Catholicism, an act causing spiritual, familial, and political struggles" and also to "the continual, internal clash between her desire for intellectual independence and achievement and the requirements of her position as daughter, wife and mother" (1980: 49). The relationship that this first critical approach posits between the author and her protagonist presents two women whose behaviours go beyond the establishment of certain social rules. Such transgressions create an internal conflict within Cary that, according to this first critical stand, is reflected in the construction of Mariam.

First of all, Cary's and Mariam's attitudes reflect a clear challenge to marriage. Since the family was considered to be the central element in society, marriage, hold to be as the familial basis, was regarded as "a state without which there can be no society in this world durable" (Richard Cosin qtd. in Callagham 1989: 21). The relationship between the welfare of the family and state was such

that James I referred to his entire power over the nation by using the analogy husband/wife: " I am the husband, all the whole Isle is my lawful wife; I am the Head" (qtd. in Callagham 1989: 20). The matrimonial union was deemed as the core of society and the running of both institutions depended on the wife's subordination to the husband. If that submission disappeared, the matrimonial, familial and social hierarchies were called into question.

Therefore, both women's challenge to the conjugal union implies a threat to the social order and shows the main element that links author and protagonist. Mariam, whose defiance of her husband, King Herod, causes her death, is depicted as a strong-willed female character who, as Cary does, also makes a choice. If Cary's internal conflict lies in the fact that she strives to combine her roles as wife and mother with her intellectual curiosity and religious ideas, Mariam's main dilemma is to find a way to show, by opposing her husband, the inappropriateness of the Renaissance motto that frames women in a closed formula of 'chastity, obedience and silence'[2].

The second direction that critics such as Nancy Gutiérrez, Marta Straznicky and Lynn Moorhead Morton have taken has been oriented to foreground the influence that the Sidney circle, led by the Countess of Pembroke, had on *The Tragedy of Mariam*[3]. These critics denounce that certain authors that follow the biographical approach portray Cary "as a cloistered young woman who dramatises her questions about life as a way for her to understand her own situation" (Gutiérrez 1991: 233). They also consider that the biography is biased and represents Cary as a "long-suffering Catholic martyr" (Morton 1994:57)[4]. However, these critics see Cary - basing

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2. Barry Weller and Margaret Ferguson remark that "English Renaissance women were to be 'chaste, silent and obedient', according to a formula repeated in numerous sermons, conduct books, and treatises on female education" (1994: 6). Such definition is based on St.Paul, 1 Timothy 2: 9-12.
3. As Krontiris states, the Countess of Pembroke "played a prominent role in the cultural life of England for nearly a quarter of a century. Under her direction, Wilton became a literary centre, comparable to continental salons. Friends, literary acquaintances, and prospective protégés visited and sometimes stayed at Wilton to present their work, circulate manuscripts, partake in discussions, and even to watch theatrical performances" (1992: 65). Mary Herbert, the Countess of Pembroke, was the first woman to publish the translation of a play in England, Robert Garnier's *Marc-Antonie* in 1592.
4. Morton also points out that the original location of the biography, which was "in the possession of the Benedictine nuns of Cambray", and "the vocation of its author –Cary's daughter Anne became Dame Clementine of the order– should alert readers to its possible bias" (1994: 57). Additionally, Ferguson also adds that "the text of the Life, according to its nineteenth-century Catholic editor, was 'corrected' by the unnamed female author's brother, his name is given to us (Patrick Cary) and he is said to have 'erased' from his sister's biography of his mother 'several passages which he considered too feminine'" (1991: 39).

their ideas on texts of the period, on Cary's own letters, and even on some details of the biography - as "a strong woman with a powerful intellectual curiosity which directed her life and resulted in relative fame among her contemporaries" (Morton 1994: 57)[5]. This approach endows the play with a literary relevance that other critics do not seem to emphasise and it shows us a Cary not so much as a woman living in subjugation and using her writing as a liberation but simply as a writer.

Morton and Straznicky have studied the elements that link Cary with the literary circle of the Countess of Pembroke, but the main evidence that proves Cary's relationship with members of that circle is the study of the play itself[6]. As the eleven plays written by the members of this coterie, *The Tragedy of Mariam* is also a closet drama[7]. These members looked to the neo-Senecan tragedies of the French dramatist Robert Garnier "to provide new models of drama to formalize and elevate English dramatic production" (Shannon 1994: 144). The Countess of Pembroke wanted to struggle against the formal weakness of the English drama of the time that her brother Philip Sidney had denounced in *A Defense of Poetry* (Shannon 1994: 144). These plays were concerned with "issues of public morality, philosophically, didactically, and often politically treated" (Beilin 1980: 45) and they focused on the conflict between the private and public life of a ruler. Our play shows the link between the personal and public sides of King Herod whose political decisions are based on his feelings for Mariam. Cary also introduces some characteristic elements of the Stoic philosophy of Senecan drama and makes use of the formal structure of the closet dramas by creating a five act play, with long soliloquies, stichomythic dialogue, the presence of a chorus, a reduced number of actors in each scene, formal complexity, the observance of the

5. There are indeed moments in Cary's life that portray her as a very strong woman. Cary kidnapped her own children in order to take them to France and convert them to Catholicism. Before she died, six of her children had already taken the Catholic faith and lived in France. There is also evidence that Cary wrote letters to the king asking for economic help when her husband and parents abandoned her.
6. According to Morton, one of the main evidences that demonstrate Cary's acquaintance with such literary circle is the fact that authors such as Drayton, Lucy Harington Russell and John Davies, all acquainted to the Countess of Pembroke, dedicated their works to Elizabeth Cary (1994: 67-72). Morton also sees in the dedicatory of Cary's play a clear reference to the Countess of Pembroke and his brother Philip Sidney (1994: 79-80).
7. These eleven plays are as follows: *The Tragedy of Antony* (1590), by Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke; *The Tragedy of Cleopatra* (1594), by Samuel Daniel; *Cornelia* (1594), by Thomas Kyd; *The Tragicomedy of the Virtuous Octavia* (1598), by Samuel Brandon; the four *Monarchicke Tragedies* (1603-1607), by William Alexander; *Philotas* (1604), by Samuel Daniel; and *Mustapha* (1596) and *Alaham* (1601), by Fulke Greville.

unities and the appearance of a nuntius who replaces the stage action with an expository narration. The conscious observance of these elements present Cary as "a woman author who is anything by domesticated, a woman who in fact shares a politically charged cultural literacy with the intellectual aristocracy of her day" (Straznicky 1994: 109).

However, we must also mention that the fact that the closet drama is a kind of genre that was generally written not to be performed on stage but to be read by a reduced group of people is linked, by some critics such as Fischer or Tina Krontiris, to the fact that the play has been written by a woman. Fischer includes the closet drama within the 'genres of marginality' among which she mentions the translations and religious texts. Krontiris supports this view with the following thesis:

> I noted that Cary chooses to write a type of drama which is for private reading. This choice of form is linked to the author's sex and is actually no choice at all. A closet play is the only type of dramatic work a woman writer can attempt in the early seventeenth century when the world of the theatre at large (not just select performances at court) is associated with loose morals and unrestrained sexuality (1993: 131).

On the other hand, Gutiérrez and Karen L. Raber show how the closet drama was not just a marginal genre used by women. According to Gutiérrez, it was used by a great number of men as a "vehicle for strategic political comment, even protest" and it turned into "a form of effective mainstream cultural engagement" (1991: 238). Raber also disputes Fischer's and Krontiris's views and remarks that "closet dramas in the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries were often published (...) the genre is thus in itself highly duplicitous, using the pretense of deliberate containment to effect, not hinder, a woman's public voice" (Raber 1985: 325).

Once the two main critical approaches to the play have been explained, I wish to point out that our study will present an intermingling of elements coming from both ways of analysing the text. The formal, structural and thematic characteristics of a closet drama give shape to a text in which a close link between autobiographical and literary elements is presented.

Let's start analysing the first lines of the text:

MARIAM How oft have I with public voice run on
To censure Rome's last hero for deceit:
Because he wept when Pompey's life was gone,
Yet when he liv'd, he thought his name to great.
But how I do recant, and, Roman lord,

> Excuse too rash a judgement in a woman:
> My sex pleads pardon, pardon then afford,
> Mistaking is with us but too too common.
>
> (I.i.1-8)

Raber's allusion to "a woman's public voice" is made explicit in the first lines of Cary's text. This issue is a leading one in the play and it refers not only to Mariam as a character but also to Cary as the author of a play. In relation to Mariam, we must emphasize Catherine Belsey's idea that "a wife's right to speak" (1985: 171) is one of the central questions in the play. The feminine public voice is immediately related in the first two lines to the notion of transgression ("run on") and of censorship (Ferguson 1991: 48). Mariam breaks the silence expected in a wife and chooses to expose her ideas freely. However, such transgression will be censored and will lead Mariam to her death. As Sohemus observes:

> SOHEMUS Unbridled speech is Mariam's worst disgrace,
> And will endanger her with desert.
>
> (III.iii.183-84)

Throughout the whole play we find allusions that denounce Mariam's attitude. The chorus will be the voice of authority that will oppose the protagonist:

> CHORUS That wife her hand against her fame doth rear,
> That more than to her lord alone will give
> A private word to any second ear,
> And though she may with reputation live,
> Yet though most chaste, she doth her glory blot,
> And wounds her honour, though she kills it not.
>
> (III.227-32)

Though the play will finally show "that Mariam's verbal openness is a sign of sexual closure" (Ferguson 1991: 53), we find in the words of the chorus that feminine oral expression and chastity are not reconcilable. Herod also justifies Mariam's repudiation and verbal freedom in her adulterous nature:

> HEROD ...she is unchaste,
> Her mouth will ope to ev'ry stranger's ear.
>
> (IV.vii.433-34)

However, most critics share Margaret Ferguson's idea that "Mariam's opening lines arguably address a problem that has to do not only with female speech in general but with the play's own mode of material existence – indeed, its *right* to exist in the world" (1991: 49). We have to take into consideration that since writing was supposed to be a masculine activity at the time, the fact that Cary endeavoured to write and publish a play was considered an anomalous one. We also have to go back to that motto against which Mariam is standing in the play, that is, the idea that all women had to be 'chaste, obedient and silent'. There existed the general belief that if a woman lacked one of those 'virtues' she immediately showed that she was deprived of the other two. It was believed that, for a woman, the mere fact of writing and publishing a play was a way of breaking her silence and, consequently, of exposing her sexual promiscuity and disobedience to her husband. As we mentioned above, if a woman challenged her husband's authority she was thought to be threatening the social order. Through her work, a woman seemed to be attempting to level her intellect with the masculine one or even trying to overcome it, a fact that was completely opposed to the notion of feminine 'inward reverence', that is, the wife's "emotional and intellectual acceptance of her husband's superiority" (Kennedy 1991: 115) that was essential to maintain the hierarchical structure. However, all these inconveniences did not prevent women like Cary from writing about issues directly related to the role of woman in society.

A dedicatory sonnet in Sir John Davies' *Muses Sacrifice; or Divine Meditations* seems to be what encouraged Cary to publish her play[8]. Davies

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8. This is Davies'dedicatory sonnet:

> Cary (of whom Minerva stands in feare,
> lest she, from her, should get Arts Regencie)
> Of Art so moves the great-all-volving Spheare,
> that ev'ry Orbe of Science moves thereby.
> Thou mak'st Melpomen proud, and my Heart great
> of such Pupill, who, in Buskin fine,
> With Feete of State, dost make they Muse to mete,
> the scenes of Syracuse and Palestine.
> Art, Language; yea; abstruse and holy Tongues,
> thy Wit and Grace acquir'd they Fame to raise;
> And still to fill thine owne, and others Songs:
> thine, with thy Parts, and others, with thy praise.
> Such nervy Limbes of art, and Straines of Wit
> Times past ne'er knew the weaker Sexe to have;
> And Times to come, will hardly credit it,
> if thus thou give thy Workes both Birth and Grave.

dedicated the sonnet to the Countess of Bedford, the Countess of Pembroke and Elizabeth Cary in 1612. In the poem, he praises Cary's work and impels her to make it public. The text was published in 1613 but we still do not know whether the publication was Cary's decision or her friends' and family's. Some critics, such as Pearse, point out that "the Stationer's Register shows that there was nothing surreptitious about the publication of the play" (1977: 606). However, the biography states that Cary "writ many things for her private recreation (...) one of them was after stolen out of that sister-in-law's (her friend's) chamber, and printed, but by her own procurement was called in" (190). Pearse remarks that the biography is articulating a traditional excuse that was usually claimed when certain texts, written by women, were published. Such statements declared, in order to protect her from social rejection, that the author did not intend to make her work public. Additionally, Pearse mentions a text written by Cary herself in one of her translations in which she contradicts her daughter's pronouncement: "I will not make use of that worn form of saying I printed it against my will, moved by importunity by friends" (1977: 606). Be that as it may, the fact is that as Barry Weller and Ferguson declare in the introduction to their edition of the play,

> this passage in the biography testifies to the psychological and cultural obstacles that stood between women like Cary and the role of "public" author. English Renaissance women were to be "chaste, silent and obedient", according to a formula repeated in numerous sermons, conduct books and treatises on female education. Although *Mariam* explicitly interrogates, even challenges, this image of normative womanhood, Cary's life dramatizes many impediments that even a socially privileged Renaissance wife encountered when she attempted to assume the role of author (1994: 6-7).

On the first lines of the play we also observe another feature that was present in many of the texts written by women at that time. We refer to Mariam's apology on lines 6-8: "Excuse too rash a judgement in a woman: / My sex pleads pardon, pardon then afford, / Mistaking is with us but too too common." This justification was quite ordinary among those texts and showed, in many cases, the author's internalization of her intellectual inferiority. For example, Margaret Cavendish, in *The Worlds Olio* (1655), wrote that

> Neither have women such tempered brains as men, such high imaginations, such subtle conceptions, such fine inventions, such solid reasons, and such sound judgement, such prudent forecast, such constant resolution, such quick sharp and ready flowing wits (qtd. in Keeble 1994: 48).

According to Krontiris, Cary's apology at the beginning of her play in Mariam's words shows the author's "reluctance to expose her works to public view" (1992: 90). However, such jusfification could also represent a feigned submissive action that allowed the publication of the play since the text was acknowledging the intellectual inferiority of women and was not considered then a threat to the social hierarchy.

The third chorus is the text in which "Cary most directly interrogates her play's own right to exist" (Ferguson 1991: 53):

> CHORUS Then she usurps upon another's right,
> That seeks to be by public language grac'd:
> And though her thoughts reflect with purest light,
> Her mind if not peculiar is not chaste.
> For in a wife it is no worse to find,
> A common body than a common mind.
> (III.239-44)

Raber considers that these lines seem "clearly to apply to Cary's desire for recognition for her talents - 'to be by public language grac'd – and not Mariam's (...) Cary may desire both kinds of 'public language', to write and circulate her play and to receive recognition for it" (1991: 123-24). The chorus clearly exposes the transgression of a woman "usurping upon another's right", that is, a man's privilege to speak and write publicly. If Cary, as the critics following the biographical approach have declared, was denouncing through Mariam's words her own conjugal and private problems, the disclosure of such ideas by writing and publishing a play constituted the most transgressive way of feminine public expression. Therefore, Mariam's apology at the beginning of the play and the chorus' accusations could also reflect that "Cary might well have been both anxious about the circulation of a text depicting an angry, discontented wife who decides not to disguise her feelings and aware that discontented speech can seem like rebellion" (Kennedy 1991: 124). If we support the thesis that it was Cary herself who decided to publish her play, such decision shows a great courage in a woman at that time. However, her voice was silenced again when not long after being published, the play was again withdrawn from circulation.

After Mariam's first lines we find a soliloquy that discloses the protagonist's conflict. Mariam hears that Herod has died and she holds contradictory feelings:

MARIAM When Herod lived, that now is done to death,
Oft have I wish'd that I from him were free:
Oft have I wish'd that he might lose his breath,
Oft have I wish'd his carcass dead to see...
(I.i.15-18)

...But now his death to memory doth call
The tender love that he to Mariam bare:
And mine to him; this makes those rivers fall,...
(I.i.31-33)

The dichotomy between love and hate that we find in these lines is a clear example of the ambivalent nature of the whole structure of the text. Mariam is presented as a woman who tries to reconcile the feelings expected from her -in a society where 'inward reverence' was every wife's duty- with her true subversive feelings of anger and hatred. Such ambivalence is shown several times in the play and mainly in texts that refer to Mariam's nature. On the one hand, Sohemus sees her as a "chaste queen" (III.iii.205); Constabarus regards her as the reflection of innocence (I.vi.500; IV.vi.314); the nuntius considers her death as "the end of beauty, chastity and wit" (V.i.4). On the other hand, we observe several attacks on Mariam coming from the chorus especially in act III; Doris –Herod's first wife– accuses Mariam of being an adulteress (IV.viii.577); and Herod's feelings towards Mariam oscillate between love and hate (IV.vii). The text introduces Mariam as a character that has a "wavering heart" (IV.vii.510). She embodies purity, beauty and intelligence but at the same time symbolises deception and adultery.

This fluctuation in the text represents a dramatic convention of the time that Callagham explains as follows:

> In tragedy there is a constant reiteration of misogynistic discourse which 'fixes' women in conceptual terms and yet, paradoxically, fixes them as unstable. That is, the difficulties attendant upon fixing the category of woman are apparent in the notion of female fickleness and instability which accompanies a polarised fixing of the category. The fear that in woman "here's beauty chang'd / To ugly whoredom" (The Changeling, V.iii.199-200) is pervasive in tragedy (1989:109).

The instability that Callagham refers to is also reflected on a more linguistic level in the text and it is addressed by Kennedy and Belsey as 'discursive discontinuity', that is, "the adoption of inconsistent or contradictory subject-positions from which to speak" (Kennedy 1990: 3). The

different images that the text offers about Mariam have led some critics to think that it is not just the text but Cary herself who is taking different stands when she develops the description of her protagonist. According to these critics, such diversity of opinions transforms the text into a discontinuous structure. In relation to this issue, we come upon two different critical stances that take discrepant positions as to Cary's attitude towards the role of her protagonist and the role of women in general in her play.

Critics such as Travitsky, Krontiris or Angeline Goureau consider that the ambivalence in the text lies in the fact that, on the one hand, Cary represents the acceptance of the rules imposed by the patriarchal society in which she is immersed. But, on the other hand, they think she wants to endow her protagonist with an identity, which is incompatible with such social structure. According to this critical approach, such textual duality discloses "the internalization of negative imagery and of patriarchal constructs of women by a woman writer – particularly by a woman writer as learned and pious as Elizabeth Cary" (Travitsky 1990: 192). The ideas expressed by the chorus and Constabarus's definition of women as "adulterous, murderous, cunning, proud" (IV.vi.334) are considered by this group of critics as a clear reflection of Cary's negative representation of her female protagonists.

However, a second group of critics, such as Fischer, Morton, Raber or Gutiérrez, contradicts such point of view. Fischer declares that to see in Cary's text a negative conception of women in general implies a wrong interpretation of the whole play (1985: 234). According to Morton, it is also an error to consider that the chorus is a faithful image of Cary's ideas since "to take the chorus's words on the duties of wives as a reflection of the author's ambivalence is to miss the function of the Senecan chorus as moralizing agent" (1994: 67). And Raber thinks that in general, "Cary's tragedy represents patriarchy as a flawed system" (1985: 334). Nevertheless, it is Gutiérrez who most directly attacks the stand of such critical approach and denounces that

> These writers assert directly or indirectly that Cary's authorial stance demonstrates her acceptance of the political and social constraints of marriage within a patriarchal society and that her energies are directed to examining options only within those limitations. I see the play, rather, as a lively experiment that challenges those very options, dramatizing the tragic consequences for both family and state when men exercise tyrannous authority and when women follow their lead (1991: 234-35).

When Cary presents the chorus's and Constabarus's attacks on women, she is just showing the general negative attitude towards women at the time

and in such society. By doing that, the author highlights her protagonist's valour when she decides to challenge her husband and maintain her integrity till the end. At the same time, she also stresses her own courage to write and publish a play whose main theme subverts one of the elements that keep such hierarchical order balanced, that is, the complete submission of women to men.

Pearse remarks that "the active and lustful Salome makes a provocative contrast with the passive and chaste Mariam, who initiates no action whatever, not even to save her own life" (1977: 605). Mariam's seeming passive attitude leads some critics to keep supporting the idea of Cary's negative attitude towards her protagonist's decisions. However, our position contradicts Pearse's remark and supports Gutiérrez's that the play is a "lively experiment", among other reasons, due to Mariam's attitude. Some critics have deprived Mariam's behaviour of any kind of rebellious or subversive nature because they do not find in her any sign of aggressiveness. However, the play does not establish a parallelism between rebelliousness and aggressiveness but, through the character of Salome, it sets a concordance between aggressiveness and ineffectiveness. Salome's claim for divorce seems to portray her as the forerunner of a feminine revolutionary movement, however, what she finally demonstrates is the cruelty and violence of a character that pursues her own benefit. Mariam does not represent that kind of aggresiveness and rebelliousness but she is not identified with passiveness either. It is Graphina, and not Mariam, who embodies in the play the motto 'chaste, obedient and silent' against which the protagonist is fighting.

Therefore, if Cary does not construct Mariam as an aggressive character as Salome and if she does not describe her as a weak and submissive one as Gaphrina, how does Cary portray her main protagonist? As opposed to Callagham's idea that claims how Mariam shows that in the play "female virtue and agency are mutually incompatible elements" (1994: 174), our analysis of the text supports the thesis that Mariam's decisions present a dynamic character whose main feature is, as Weller and Ferguson remark, a "passive aggressiveness" (1994: 36). Such kind of aggressiveness places Mariam in an intermediate position between Salome's rebelliousness and Graphina's inactivity and demonstrates that "female transgression can be read as challenging the polarised stereotypes of passive victim and strong woman within which discussion of the category of woman in tragedy has for so long been confirmed" (Callagham 1989: 64).

Mariam's leading attitude in the play is represented in the following lines that she addresses to Herod:

MARIAM	My lord, I suit my garment to my mind, And there no cheerful colours can I find. (IV.iii.91-92)

MARIAM	I cannot frame disguise, nor never taught My face a look dissenting from my thought. (IV.iii.145-46)

There is a clear correspondence between external signs such as outward appearance and words and internal elements such as feelings or thoughts. Such parallelism was a constant tenet in Cary's life and critics that follow the biographical approach consider Mariam's attitude as a clear reflection of the author's conviction, which is shown in the biography as follows:

> She did always much disapprove the practice of satisfying oneself with their conscience being free from fault, not forbearing all that might have the least show, or suspicion, of uncomeliness, or unfitness; what she thought to be required in this she expressed in this motto (which she caused (to be inscribed) in her daughter's wedding ring): be and seem *sendl Falleland* (195).

When Mariam finally knows that her husband has not died, her feelings of hate towards him prevail. She chooses to abandon him and publicly show her decision. Mariam is also aware that her opposition to Herod could lead her to death:

MARIAM	I will not to his love be reconcil'd, With solemn vows I have forsworn his bed.
SOHEMUS	But you must break those vows.
MARIAM	I'll rather break The heart of Mariam. Cursed is my fate: But speak no more to me, in vain ye speak To live with him I so profoundly hate. (III.iii.133-38)

If we analyse the words of the chorus in act III, we observe that Mariam's alternative clearly defies its authority:

CHORUS	'Tis not enough for one that is a wife To keep her spotless from an act of ill: But from suspicion she should free her life, And bare herself of power as well as will.

Tis not so glorious for her to be free,
As by her proper self restrain'd to be.
(III.215-20)

When to their husbands they themselves do bind,
Do they not wholly give themselves away?
Or give they but their body, not their mind,
Reserving that, though best, for other's prey?
No sure, their thoughts no more can be their own,
And therefore should to none but one be known.
(III.233-38)

Mariam and the chorus are both exposing very different interpretations of Cary's motto 'be and seem'. The chorus is here referring to the correspondence between 'inward and outward reverence' which implies that the wife's body and soul belong to her husband and that her "submissive speech and behaviour be signs of an interior (intellectual and emotional) acceptance of her inferiority to her husband" (Kennedy 1990:113). However, Mariam decides to follow the maxim 'be and seem' as a correspondence between what we could call 'an outward and inward irreverence' that will last till the end of the play.

Such constant parallelism between external and internal elements in Mariam counters the representation of the protagonist as an inconstant woman, as a "wavering heart" as we mentioned above. On the contrary, constancy is Mariam's first feature. However, we must bear in mind that the term 'constancy' also meant the wife's total submission to her husband in the seventeenth century. Mariam rejects such subordination at the same time that blames Herod for her attitude:

MARIAM And blame me not, for Herod's jelousy
Had power even constancy itself to change.
(I.i.23-24)

In fact, the text shows how Mariam's constancy lies in her powerful decisions and, at the same time, it portrays a king who is accused of fickleness. Alexandra, Mariam's mother, calls him "unconstant wavering lord" (I.ii.127). Pheroras, Herod's brother, accuses him of having whimsically abandoned her first wife Doris (II.i.30-31). And Mariam describes her husband's love as "unstable" (IV.iii.148). There is a change of roles in the text, Mariam acquires a power generally granted to men and Herod is endowed, as Callagham observed and we also mentioned above, with a feature traditionally related to women, that is, inconstancy.

Mariam's superiority is not just moral but also political. Herod is identified with a "fatal enemy to royal blood" (I.ii.91) after murdering Hircanus, Mariam's grandfather and king of Jews, and Aristobolus, Mariam's brother. Alexandra then presents Mariam, and not Herod, as the succesor to Hircanus and Alexander, Mariam's father (I.ii.143-50). It is also Mariam who places herself on a higher social level than Herod's. As she says to Salome:

> MARIAM Though I thy brother's face had never seen,
> My birth thy baser birth so far excell'd,
> I had to both of you the princess been.
> (I.iii.232-34)

But it is even Herod himself who finally admits after Mariam's death that "'Tis I have overthrown your royal line" (V.i.178).

Mariam's superiority and Herod's instability lay open a clear objection to the social and political system whose limitations are intended to be uncovered by the text. First of all, we observe a clear challenge to the conjugal union within which the wife is a secondary member. The fact that Mariam is presented as a queen is also relevant since queens "were political figures in their own right" and "were legally exempted from the rule of female 'coverture' even if they married" (Ferguson 1991: 43). As we have already observed, the matrimonial union was the heart of the familial structure, which was at the centre of the social system. Consequently, the text is opposing the social hierarchical organisation prevailing in the period.

Secondly, the fact that both masculine and feminine characters are accused of inconstancy, fickleness or instability shows that the place of both men and women were not really defined in such hierarchical structure where the family was the symbol of the state. According to Belsey in the case of women it is not

> simply a question of a three-level hierarchy, a chain of command, where the husband gives orders to the wife, who in turn instructs the children. On the contrary, it is clear that the children owe obedience direct to the father. The hierarchy has two levels and the woman belongs firmly to neither (1985: 155).

As to the masculine position in such hierarchy, Raber remarks that "the very term patriarch was so overdetermined for early modern culture that it was inherently unstable" (1985: 333). Raber develops his ideas as follows:

> If the king, God, and the head of a family are all patriarchs, they are also potentially competitive with one another. The familial patriarch, who owes

> allegiance and absolute obedience to the king but is expected to rule as a mirror-image of the king within his domestic sphere, is at once absolutely powerful (in relation to his "subjects") and absolutely powerless (in relation to his king) (1985: 331).

Not only Mariam's but also Salome's actions and decisions, as Constabarus observes, attempt to "reverse all order" (I.vi.458). In spite of the fact that both female protagonists present clear differences between them, Weller and Ferguson point out that "there is more affinity between Mariam and Salome, or their situations, than either woman would care to acknowledge" (1994: 36). Salome's main challenge to such order lies in her claim for the right of divorce expressed in the following terms:

> SALOME Why should such privilege to man be given?
> Or given to them, why barr'd from women then?
> Are men than we in greater grace with Heaven?
> Or cannot women hate as well as men?
> I'll be the custom-breaker: and begin
> To show my sex the way to freedom's door,
> And with an off'ring will I purge my sin;
> The law was made for none but who are poor.
> (I.iv.305-312)

Salome tries to impose the idea that "gender difference is a manufactured structure" (Raber 1985: 336). According to the protagonist, the hierarchical system should be based not on sex but on wealth. Salome appoints herself "the custom-breaker" and presents herself as the predecessor of women such as Batshua Makin. Makin, more than fifty years later and in her *Essay to Revive the Antient Education of Gentlewomen* (1673), proclaims that woman is not naturally inferior to man and that only custom and education have created such vision:

> Custom when it is inveterate, hath a mighty influence: it hath the force of Nature itself. The barbarous custom to breed women low is grown general amongst us, and hath prevailed so far, that it is verily believed (especially amongst a sort of debauched sots) that women are not endued with such reason as men, not capable of the improvement by education as they are (qtd. in Keeble 1994: 50).

Salome's words present a clear opposition to the 'double standard' that placed men on a privileged level and women on a secondary one. Herod's sister clearly shows the "stated aspirations for a single standard" (Travitsky

1990: 186) and challenges the authority to such extent that she even substitutes law for her own determinations: "My will shall be to me instead of Laws" (I.vi.454). The resulting social instability that such ideas imply is highlighted in Constabarus's statement:

CONSTABARUS Are Hebrew women now transformed to men?
Why do you not as well our battles fight,
And wear our armour? Suffer this, and then
Let all the world be topsy-turvèd quite.
(I.vi.421-24)

However, Salome does not intend to reach a complete independence. She only wants to divorce Constabarus because she wants to marry Silleus. We consider this fact outstanding since it shows that Salome seems to be perfectly aware of the way the social structure works and considers that the only way she has to reach her aims is by adapting herself to such system and by using hypocrisy as her main weapon. Mariam's correspondence between appearance and reality is inverted in Salome's behaviour, she is described by her husband as a

CONSTABARUS ...painted sepulchre,
That is both fair, and vilely foul at once.
(II.iv.325-26)

Such dissimulation is what finally encourages Herod to murder her wife in act IV. Such decision shows the king's weakness and Salome's power to turn domestic issues into political and unjust decisions such as the beheading of the queen. Raber concludes that "Salome introduces the notion that the most successful position for a woman within a patriarchal society headed by an absolute ruler is one which exploits the artificiality of the one by mimicking the worst excesses of the other" (1985: 336). However, the interest of the play does not lie in Salome's violent and rebellious acts and statements but in the freedom that, paradoxically, Mariam achieves after her death. According to Ferguson, "Cary rejects the option of turning Mariam's energies outward to some form of collective action" (1991: 59). Our analysis of Mariam's death will defy such assertion.

When Mariam decides to challenge her husband's will, she thinks her "innocence" will be the "shelter" (II.iii.171) and "fair defence" (173) of her "inward grief" (172). However, she finally realises that her decision will hopelessly lead her to death:

MARIAM Am I the Mariam that presum'd so much,
And deem'd my face must needs preserve my breath?
Ay, I it was that thought my beauty such,
As it alone could countermand my death.
(IV.viii.525-36)

Some critics such as Weller and Ferguson have considered such words as "the result of arrogance and miscalculation" (1994: 39). However, Mariam's words do not represent beauty as a way of persuasion. On the contrary, they expose her hope in the motto 'be and seem' and show the identification of such external beauty with an internal one, that is, with her innocence. Mariam finally admits that a woman must be chaste, pure and innocent but also submissive and silent if she wants to save her life:

MARIAM But now, though out of time, I plainly see
It could be drawn, though never drawn from me,
Had I but with humility been grac'd,
As well as fair I might have prov'd me wise:
But I did think because I knew me chaste,
One virtue for a woman might suffice.
That mind for glory of our sex might stand,
Wherein humility and chastity
Doth march with equal paces hand in hand.
(IV.viii.557-65)

However, though she acknowledges the authority of the formula 'chaste, silent and obedient', she finally decides to continue to challenge it and keep her position till the end. Therefore, she opts for preserving her soul and abandoning her body. Mariam concludes her preceding speech as follows:

MARIAM But one, if single seen, who setteth by?
And I had singly one, but 'tis my joy,
That I was ever innocent, though sour:
And therefore can they but my life destroy,
My soul is free from adversary's power.
(IV.viii.566-70)

Mariam abandons all earthly concerns and decides to preserve her spirit. Such attitude is a stoic element of the Senecan drama that Cary introduces in her play. Marta Straznicky analyses the elements that

belong to such philosophical school and applies it to *The Tragedy of Mariam*:

> In both classical and Renaissance stoicism, the ideal of self-sufficiency is arrived at by a rerouting of the trajectory of desire from material to spiritual goals (...) the will of the wise man is properly detached from his "carnal eies & sences" and directed inward toward those things that are strictly within his own control (1994: 115).

The whole process of Mariam's death can be analysed in the light of these stoic characteristics. Following the Stoic ideal, says Morton,

> Mariam appears to go to her death almost willingly (...) and *her* appearance of helplessness is not victimization but heroism (...) dying well, then is a stoic trait. The dignity of Mariam's death is continually stressed; her calm acceptance of her fate is most certainly rooted in Stoicism (1994: 98-99).

However, it is Straznicky who accurately shows that even though Mariam's death has a stoic nature, it is not "a finished portrait of stoic virtue" (1994: 125). This author points out that Mariam lacks the main stoic virtue, that is, constancy or tranquility, defined by Lipsius as "a right and immoveable strength of the minde, neither lifted up nor pressed downe with external or casuall accidentes" (qtd. in Straznicky 1994: 128). And it is also described, in the case of women, as the "complete surrender of desire" (Straznicky 1994: 128) and submission to her husband. But Mariam's abdication is not total. It is just a physical, material and earthly one, but it is not a spiritual resignation. Mariam does not finally accept her husband's will, "she does not in fact reform" (Straznicky 1994: 130). If, as Straznicky remarks, "the heart of the stoic paradox" lies in the fact that "the surrender of a certain kind of will is in reality a magnificent conquest" (1994: 116), Mariam's abandonment of the material life will lead her to a personal triumph. Such victory is mainly expressed in the nuntius' words when narrating Mariam's behaviour and external appearence on her way to death:

> NUNTIO She came unmov'd, with pleasant grace,
> As if to triumph her arrival were:
> In stately habit, and with cheerful face:
> Yet ev'ry eye was moist but Mariam's there.
> (V.I.55-58)

Ferguson destroys such triumphal vision of Mariam's death and states that it could also be interpreted as "a symbolic act of authorial self-punishment that affirms the value of female silence" (1988: 110) and that it also represents Mariam "as a woman who has somehow learned to bridle her tongue" (1991: 56). Such ideas are based on Mariam's silence as an aswer to her mother's duplicitous insults when she accuses her daughter of having disobeyed her husband. However, Mariam's silence is joined by "a dutiful, though scornful, smile" (V.i.52). Kennedy remarks that such verse is "susceptible to multiple interpretations" (1991: 125). But if we go back again to the maxim 'be and seem', we will just have a single interpretation: Mariam's face reflects a clear defiance to her mother's words. It is interesting to observe how Mariam's corporal language, in a way, prevails at the end of the play.

There is another argument that counters Ferguson's thesis as to Mariam's language. Paradoxically, it is Ferguson herself who gives us such argument when she declares that once Mariam dies, Herod "suddenly starts to value Mariam's words with passionate desire" (1991: 56). The king compares Mariam's words to a "sweet tune" (V.i.65) and to "the food whereon my heart is fed" (V.i.72). He even admits Mariam's chastity and purity: "I hold her chaste ev'n in my inmost soul" (V.i.76). Therefore, Herod finally acknowledges that the formula 'chaste, obedient and silence' is not valid at all.

After his wife's death, Herod is left alone with her utter silence and absence. Bearing in mind that in the Renaissance such utter silence, as Kennedy states, was read as "a potentially subversive art of resistance (or at least an ambiguous one), because inward reverence was not confirmed" (1991: 116), we can conclude that Mariam's death and silence present her ultimate and peaceful defiance to Herod. As Pheroras says to Graphina:

PHERORAS Why speaks thou not, fair creature? Move thy tongue
For silence is a sign of discontent
(II.i.42)

The queen's absence leads Herod to a state of total state of confusion. His own words present him as a king completely apart from his public and political life, waiting for his own death and deprived of any power:

HEROD I'll muffle up myself in endless night,
And never let mine eyes behold the light.
Retire thyself, vile monster, worse than he
That stain'd the virgin earth with brother's blood
Still in some vault or den enclosèd be,

> Where with thy tears thou may'st beget a flood,
> Which flood in time may drown thee: happy day
> When thou at once shalt die and find a grave;
> A stone upon the vault someone shall lay,
> Which monument shall an inscription have,
> And these shall be the words it shall contain:
> *Here Herod lies, that hath his Mariam slain.*
> (V.i.247-58)

Herod's last reaction, which places him in a secondary position and Mariam in a primary one, shows Cary as an author who does not just imitate the stoic elements that are present in other closet dramas of the Sidney circle. Cary recreates such features and gives the text a different shape. As Straznicky remarks,

> While the stoic ethic in *Mariam* does deliver the female hero from oppression into death, it also delivers to her a personal power that is not scripted by any of Cary's predecessors. In the fifth act of the play Cary reverts to a male-like stoic discourse, representing Mariam as effectively subversive and Herod as utterly debilitated (1994: 124).

Such personal power that Straznicky refers to lies in the freedom that Mariam reaches after her death. Mariam achieves to liberate her soul and remove it from any "adversary's power". Throughout the whole text there is a constant rhyme between the terms 'breath' and 'death'[9]. It seems to announce that death will destroy Mariam's life and at the same time her oral subversive language. However, the last rhyme should be foregrounded:

> NUNTIO "Tell thou my lord thou saw'st me loose my breath."
> HEROD Oh, that I could that sentence now control.
> NUNTIO "If guiltily, eternal be my death"
> (V.i.73-75)

According to Maureen Quilligan "the spelling of 'loose' allows the text to have it both ways: Mariam not only 'loses' her breath by dying, she sets her speech 'loose', finally free from Herod's control in death" (1993: 227). Herod's words lose all their power to control and revoke the "sentence" of

9. We find the same rhyme in the following lines in the text: I.i.15,17; I.iii.208,210; I.iii.244,246; II.ii.147,149; IV.iv.215,217; V.i.272,274.

death penalty that he ordered and also Mariam's "sentence" that the nuntius articulates. Mariam's death deprives him of the power to control her body, mind, soul and words. Therefore, this last rhyme in the fifth act betneen the tesms "death" and "loose breath" implies, if we take the meaning of 'loose' as 'release', an equation between death and liberation. This freedom has been Mariam's individual achievement.

However, if we consider, as Beilin does, that Mariam's death can be deemed as "a Christian allegory" (1980: 46), we realise that such death does not only imply a personal victory but also –and here we contradict Ferguson's already mentioned opinion– a collective action[10]. Mariam is sometimes presented in the text as an exceptional woman, quite different from all the rest. Constabarus, for example, distinguishes Mariam from the rest of women as follows:

> CONSTABARUS You wavering crew: my curse to you I leave,
> You had but one to give you any grace:
> And you yourselves will Mariam's life bereave;
> Your commonwealth doth innocency chase.
> (IV.vi.311-14).

Mariam is here compared to Christ. She is depicted by Constabarus, unlike the rest of women, as someone virtuous and innocent who is being discriminated against by all the rest. There are other moments in the play in which both figures are clearly identified. Herod establishes a comparison between Mariam and "the fairest lamb / Of all the flock" (IV.iv.248-49). Such expression reminds us of the name given to Christ as the "Lamb of God" in the Bible. The narrator of Mariam's death refers to the "phoenix' nest" (V.i.24). The Phoenix has traditionally symbolised Christ's resurrection. Her public execution and Alexandra's rebukes to Mariam when she is heading to her death (V.i.33) could be related to the crowds vilifying Christ before the crucifixion. The suicide of the servant that betrayed Mariam is connected with Judas Iscariote's suicide (V.i.104-10). And finally, Christ's resurrection is also alluded in Mariam's last words to Herod, which are articulated by the nuntius:

10. In the construction of Mariam's death, we clearly see the link between biographical elements, that is, Cary's religious beliefs, and philosophical and literary features such as the stoic elements which are characteristic of the Senecan plays and that appear in most closet dramas.

NUNTIUS 'By three days hence, if wishes could revive,
I know himself would make me oft alive'
(V.i.77-78)

Such parallelisms endow Mariam's death with new connotations. The Christian doctrine considers death as a triumph since it leads to eternal life. Mariam's death is considered then as something positive also from a religious point of view. But additionally, we should also take into account Fischer's idea that "Mariam's individual sacrifice has a profound social effect" (1985: 236). This author also points out that if Christ's death implied the end of sin and human redemption, Mariam's death - following the identification Christ-Mariam - symbolizes in the text the end of a masculine authority reflected in Herod's state after Mariam's death (1985: 236). Though Fischer remarks that the rest of the female protagonists' actions in the play "fail to offer a 'counter-universe' to the male oriented and dominated order" (1985: 233), she also observes that Mariam's death "opens the way for a change" (1985: 237). Such change is the collective action that Ferguson did not find in Mariam's attitude and that is reflected in a text in which the queen's resolutions lead to a political and social chaos in which the head of such social system is completely deprived of authority.

The different connotations of Mariam's death lead me to finish this paper by alluding to the importance of this play as the first drama written and published by a woman in England. As we observed at the beginning of the analysis of the play, as Beilin remarked, "to read a play as the expression of an author's inmost feelings and ideas is always to risk misinterpretation" (1980: 45). However, Mariam's uniqueness in the text as a singular woman, whose attitude and death imply a change of direction in the text, could be clearly identified with Cary's decision to be the first woman to show her work publicly.

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