THE TRAGEDY OF MARIAM AND THE WOMAN QUESTION DEBATE

"BY PUBLIC LANGUAGE GRAC'D":

THE TRAGEDY OF MARIAM AND THE WOMAN QUESTION DEBATE

By

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A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies

in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Arts

McMaster University

MASTER OF ARTS (1995) McMASTER UNIVERSITY
(English) Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: "By public language grac'd"
The Tragedy of Mariam and the Woman Question Debate

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NUMBER OF PAGES: v, 90

ABSTRACT

At the heart of Elizabeth Cary's play *The Tragedy of Mariam* are the intertwined issues of feminine virtue, authority and voice. Throughout the play the characters debate these issues with each other and to themselves filling the play with conflicting and uncertain voices regarding these central issues. Since the recent resurrection of Cary's tragedy, twentieth-century critics have discussed and attempted to discern with which of these voices the play's ultimate sentiments lie. This paper brings to that discussion a new perspective which results in a radically different conclusion than has been considered by critics thus far. This paper examines the relationship of *The Tragedy of Mariam* to a public debate - the "woman question" debate - which was being waged in print during the same time that Cary composed her play and examines the same central issues of feminine virtue, authority and voice. A comparison of these two forums - the play and the debate - reveals that *Mariam* echoes with innumerable allusions to the opinions expressed within the debate. These allusions draw the Early Modern debate itself into the play to the end of ultimately undermining the underlying assumptions on which the woman question debate (and much of the Renaissance's image of woman) were founded. By viewing the play against the context of the debate, it is also possible to see the original perspective which Cary brought to these issues by engaging them within the genre of drama, a genre which allowed her to overcome the limitations encountered by other women writers who responded within the confines of the debate. This approach to Cary's play reveals that rather than participating in the woman question debate and allying with any particular side, *The Tragedy of Mariam* is a harsh critique on the debate itself and the assumptions about woman embedded within it.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My heart-felt thanks to . . .

My supervisor, Dr. Mary Silcox, for her assistance in creating this paper;

My wonderful parents for their endless encouragement and support;

My successful and accomplished sister, who encouraged my pursuit of 'the arts' by going into business;

Joanne, whose bright inspiration and beautiful friendship are woven through every word;

Joe, my crisis support line;

Shirley and co. for their unconditional faith and attempts to foster my 'right brain';

Dr. B.F. Tyson, for inspiring in me a love of literature and literary studies;

The many members of the Unitarian Church of Hamilton for all their varied assistance and friendships which lightened the process of this past year;

Allison, Barb, Karen, Rana, Mike, Trevor, Chris, Shannon, Peter, Scott, Erica, Tom, Fiona. Alex, Mala and all of the many other friends and family who believed that I could do this more than I did myself.

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INTRODUCTION: DEBATE

> *The work is a link in the chain of speech communion. . . . it is related to other work-utterances: both those to which it responds and those that respond to it.*
>
> - Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Problem of Speech Genres.*

At the end of the third act in Elizabeth Cary's play *The Tragedy of Mariam*, the Chorus criticises the play's heroine, Mariam, for speaking her thoughts to those other than her husband. Apparently viewing any relationship outside the 'private' sphere of marriage as 'public', the Chorus addresses its criticism to not just Mariam but married women in general, when it proclaims that:

> . . . 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. (3.3.239-42)

This pronouncement, made during the Chorus's central appearance, succinctly embodies the play's central inter-related issues of women's virtue, authority and voice. In addressing the question of women's voice in this passage, the Chorus raises the questions of virtue and authority. Virtue and authority are the standards by which the Chorus judges voice; the Chorus censures women's speech on the basis that it violates both the image of her virtuousness and the authorized power structures. This basis reveals that the Chorus's beliefs are founded in the acceptance of a gender-differential. Virtue, authority and voice are here understood with a specifically feminine definition;

they are used also as a part of creating and maintaining a definition of woman. Throughout the play, these issues of women's virtue, authority and voice continuously intertwine, twisting the opinions and assumptions about each into the others. These entangled issues are at the crux of Mariam's personal debate.

These same defining issues were also at the crux of a *public* debate on the "woman question" during the time in which Cary wrote and published *The Tragedy of Mariam*. The "woman question", which has been a perennially favourite topic of debate in Western culture, raged during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries directly and indirectly in virtually all forms of speech and literature. The Renaissance contributed a unique chapter to this ongoing debate by voicing it within the form of the printed pamphlet. Within these pamphlets, authors articulated formal arguments either attacking or defending women primarily from a theoretical perspective. Because of the heavy emphasis of these works in formal theoretical arguments rather than actual practical concerns, Linda Woodbridge, in her extensive study of these texts, *Women and the English Renaissance*, terms this aspect of the multi-form debate "the formal controversy" (13).

The pamphlets both drew from and were accessed as sources for the debate as it was explored in other written and verbal forms. Henderson and McManus note the influence of classical, biblical and courtly traditions on the formal aspect of the debate (4-11)[1], and the manner in which the pamphlets "provided a framework for the debate

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[1] Linda Woodbridge also notes the formal controversy's multitude of sources with her examination of each individual pamphlet.

about women and a reservoir of examples and arguments upon which writers of ballads and other types of poetry, popular drama, conduct books and sermons could draw" (11-12). As a result, the formal controversy pulses with the sentiments of the larger debate while, since the main focus of the pamphlets is theoretical, condensing the implicit philosophies of that debate into its own arguments. In this manner, the formal controversy provides an accurate and succinct presentation of the philosophies underlying the woman controversy of the English Renaissance.

The relatively inexpensive form of the pamphlet allowed the formal controversy to gain wide and popular distribution. Katherine Henderson and Barbara McManus in *Half Humankind* observe that "the rise of printing made possible an increase in the number of attacks and defenses and a wider dissemination of these to the middle-class populace of London, who were apparently increasingly eager for such reading material" (11). The dialogic nature of the debate also increased the number of attacks and defenses; writers were sparked to refute the published pamphlets of others. As debate, each work is linked to the others. Some, such as Jane Anger's *Protection for Women*, Edward Gosynhill's *Mulierum Pean*, and the female-authored defenses in the "Swetnam Controversy" were written with direct reference to preceding works (in the case of Gosynhill, possibly of his own authorship). Other works, while not directly refuting a specific author or piece, address the general themes recurrent in

the printed debate. This dialogic engagement led to the popular printed debate gaining the label "the pamphlet war"[2].

The ability of an author to enter into this dialogue without a specifically directed rebuttal attests to the uniformity of the premises of the debate. These premises, once again, bind together assumptions on the crucial issues of virtue, authority and voice. Regardless of whether the argument is voiced as a praise or criticism of women, with very few exceptions, the authors rely upon the same value judgements and accepted philosophies of these issues. As a result, the pamphlets generally support the same philosophical ideals and only argue the extent to which reality, as they see it, corresponds with or deviates from that ideal. This uniformity is apparent for example in the debate's assumptions on virtue. While the attacks criticize women by citing examples of unfaithful wantons, the defenses praise them with examples of chaste virgins and faithful wives. The underlying ideal of feminine chastity, which is the foundation of both sides of the debate, is taken as an axiom and remains unchallenged.

These principles which are articulated from both sides of the debate in the pamphlet war are also articulated in *The Tragedy of Mariam*. In *Mariam* this occurs in part through the voice of the Chorus, as in the lines cited above regarding women's authority to public voice. It is appropriate that the words of the Chorus, as the voice

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[2] While Linda Woodbridge in *Women and the English Renaissance* prefers the term "formal controversy" to "pamphlet war," used by Katherine Henderson and Barbara McManus, I use the two terms interchangeably.

of the established society of the play, would echo the established societal assumptions vocalized through the pamphlets of the formal controversy. The philosophies of the pamphlets are also articulated by other characters within the play. Consistent with the acceptance of conventional beliefs about woman by both male and female writers in the debate, it is both male and female characters within the play who give voice to these beliefs. Considering the pervasiveness of arguments concerning woman's virtue, authority and voice in the seventeenth century, it is not surprising to find the same issues re-echoed in *Mariam*. Considering the overwhelming affirmation of a similar ideal of woman within the debate, it is not surprising that Cary's play presents the same image. What is remarkable, however, is the manner in which Cary engages these issues and that image within her play. Through the expanded context of the drama, *Mariam* challenges the perceptions of the debate and undermines the validity of its conclusions regarding women's virtue, authority and voice. *Mariam* begins to untangle the manner in which these issues are twined together.

Written by a woman, during a time in which the nature of woman, inseparable from the issues of authority and voice, was being debated in print, *The Tragedy of Mariam* by its very existence is engulfed in the debate. The interconnections between the play and the controversy have not gone unnoticed by recent critics. In her examination of the controversy, Linda Woodbridge makes note of the infiltration of images and themes from the controversy into contemporary literature including *Mariam*; Sandra Fischer in "Elizabeth Cary and Tyranny, Domestic and Religious" and Elaine Beilin in "The Making of a Female Hero," while examining *Mariam*, both

comment on the significance of the contemporary controversy. But these works just touch on the existence of a relationship between *Mariam* and the woman controversy without examining the nature or significance of that crucial relationship.

This omission is surprising considering that the majority of recent criticism on the tragedy has examined the issues of women's virtue, authority and voice in the text. The resurrection of the text due largely to modern feminist theory's interest in women's authorship has resulted in these crucial gender issues being prominent in the criticism on the play. The interpretations of the play's stance towards these issues, however, are amazingly contentious. In "The Spectre of Resistance," Margaret Ferguson notes the lack of consensus among readers regarding the play's statement on "a woman's right to assume a 'public' voice" (236). Ferguson herself categorises the question as "unanswered" before launching into a detailed examination (in this and her other publications: "Running On with Almost Public Voice" and "A Room Not Their Own") of the play's confusing balance between premises supporting and attacking women's voice. On the interconnected question of authority, Catherine Belsey reads the same ambiguity. In *The Subject of Tragedy*, she claims that "the play as a whole seems to oscillate between endorsement and disapproval of Mariam's defiance" (174). In "Husband Murder and Petty Treason," Betty S. Travitsky offers the similar pronouncement of "an ambivalence in the playwright's mind over stark subordination in marriage" to account for the unequal punishments of Salome and Mariam (187).

The perception of ambivalence arises from these critics focusing their attention, almost exclusively, on deciphering the play's attitudes towards the women. This

recurrent focus, no doubt, results from the tragedy being primarily revived in the interest of women's issues. This interest has brought to light many works and approaches which have been neglected until recently, broadening the scope of literary studies. However, it also has the potential to inadvertently limit the scope of textual understandings. Barbara Keifer Lewalski observes and criticises the unnecessary limitations within which critics have been viewing these recently revived works of women authors:

> . . . the newly important women's texts are often too narrowly contextualized in literary and historical terms - a pity since they come before us so bare and unaccommodated without the accretion of scholarship and critical opinion through the ages that so largely determines how we understand and value literary works. (793)

The Tragedy of Mariam is one of these texts which has been too narrowly contextualized; it is persistently viewed with this limited focus on the 'ambivalent' portrayal of the female characters. This focus is frequently supported by another text with a similar focus on portraying the individual: Elizabeth Cary's biography, *The Lady Falkland, Her Life,* written by one of Cary's daughters. Most notably, but not exclusively, this approach is taken by Elaine Beilin who, in "Elizabeth Cary and *The Tragedie of Mariam*" reads the play as a parallel expression of Cary's own conflicting desires towards obedience and independence represented in her biography.

If the text is approached from a different angle, an entirely new picture of the play's sympathies arises. A few critics have recently begun to focus on the portrayal of the society in the play (instead of the individuals), informed by an understanding of the author's own society (rather than her individual life). This approach has yielded a

vision of *Mariam* that reveals the politically confrontational and challenging stance of the play. Marta Straznicky in "Profane Stoical Paradoxes" views *Mariam* within the light of stoicism to demonstrate how it challenges the stoical philosophies which help maintain the "private, domestic, apolitical space" the Renaissance designated for women (133). Nancy A. Guiterrez challenges the accretions she perceives have already accumulated on and distorted Cary's tragedy and attempts to "erase the picture of Cary as a cloistered young woman who dramatizes her questions about life as a way for her to understand her own situation" (233). Instead Guiterrez explores, in "Valuing Mariam," Cary's use of the politically-charged genre of closet drama to challenge the seventeenth-century's gender standards. Guiterrez stops short of calling the play a "subversive document," however, when she suddenly switches her focus away from the critical portrayal of society to the 'ambivalent' portrayal of women. Gwynne Kennedy does not stop at this point. In "Lessons of the 'Schoole of wisedome'," she looks at Renaissance marriage texts to gain insight into the societal commentary of the play and concludes that "*Mariam* is quite arguably a subversive text" (129). Touching on an idea which I will expand in my own work, Laurie J. Shannon discusses, in "*The Tragedie of Mariam*: Cary's Critique on the Terms of Founding Social Discourse," the social criticism which *Mariam* makes on inequity within the social structure.

These 'societal' approaches clearly present an aspect of *Mariam* neglected and unappreciated by the 'character' approaches. Interestingly, the connection of the play with the woman question debate is mentioned only in works dominated by the latter

approach. No work previously has delved more deeply than brushing the surface of this connection. Considering how the 'character' approaches avoid examining the society of Cary's play, even these casual mentions of the debate must be sceptically viewed as providing, at best, a limited insight into the relationship between the two. Sandra K. Fischer's unexplored statement in "Elizabeth Cary and Tyranny, Domestic and Religious" that "the play is remarkable in its avoidance of feminist propositions, especially considering the proliferation of broadsides of the Swetnam and Munda variety at this time, both attacking and defending the female sex," reveals that, despite a critic realizing the connection, without an in-depth exploration of the nature of that connection, it can be completely misinterpreted. It is precisely considering 'broadsides of the Swetnam and Munda variety" that *The Tragedy of Mariam* is revealed to be, if not a feminist, a proto-feminist criticism of society's gender definitions.

In this paper I will argue that Elizabeth Cary's play *The Tragedy of Mariam* actively engages with the Renaissance debate over the woman question as reflected in the pamphlets of the formal controversy. I will demonstrate how, through the dramatization of the thematic issues of women's virtue, authority and voice, and by its very existence in print, *Mariam* brings to the debate an unexplored or under-explored perspective in Jacobean England which challenges the founding assumptions of these issues within the formal controversy. This paper examines the response which *Mariam* offers to the issue, the argument, and the medium of the formal controversy. The first chapter examines *Mariam*'s response to the issue at the heart of the woman controversy: virtue. Here, I will show how, through dramatization, Cary's play

undermines the perception of women's virtue promoted in the debate and how, through the repetition of words, images and ideas from the pamphlets, it extends the invalidation to the debate itself. The second chapter examines *Mariam*'s challenge to the argument of the controversy, that is, the justifications which the attackers and defenders use to support their views of woman. *Mariam* dramatizes that the structures of authority cited by the pamphleteers to support the subordination and virtue of women have the antithetical effect of promoting insubordination and vice in women. Chapter Three examines Cary's response to the medium in which the argument is debated, writing in particular and public voice in general. *Mariam* illustrates the powerful influence which speech has within the plot of the play and, once again, through echoing the words of the pamphlets, implicates the debate in perpetuating images and ideals of women which prove dangerous to both genders.

The concern of this paper is to examine the response which Cary's play offers to the philosophy of the multi-form societal debate on the woman question. The pamphlets of the formal controversy, due to their theoretical focus and their interconnections to the other aspects of the debate, provide a suitable condensation of this otherwise indomitably vast topic. For the purposes of this paper I have selected only certain works within this limited debate to discuss. As the majority of the works reflect similar assumptions and approaches to the issue, a sampling of the works is

sufficient to reveal these philosophies without encumbering the paper with repetition[3]. In the interest of dialogue, I am examining those pamphlets of the controversy which have been discussed within other recent works of criticism so that the additional perspectives of these works may provide greater insight into the woman controversy.

This thesis is in part a response to Henderson and McManus's hope that the increased attention to and availability of the texts of the formal controversy will "shed new light on the imaginative literature of Renaissance England" (4). The light which the texts of the controversy shed on *Mariam* reveals the central significance of the dialogic dynamic which the play establishes between itself and society concerning the issues of virtue, authority and voice within the woman question.

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[3]As I am viewing the pamphlets as an expression of the pervasive societal philosophy of the Renaissance, the actual publication dates of the specific pamphlets are not limiting factors in themselves. A number of the pamphlets which were published after the composition and publication of *Mariam* reveal important philosophies which would still have been present during the time in which Cary wrote the play.

CHAPTER ONE

THE ISSUE: VIRTUE

> *The woman of modesty openeth not her mouth. . . . A Harlot is full of words.*
>
> - Barnabe Rich, *The Excellency of good women.*

Regarding the question of feminine virtue, *The Tragedy of Mariam* gives voice to various, contradictory standards, some vocalised, some enacted. The Chorus, as the voice of the general society, promotes the conventional Renaissance standard of silence, chastity and obedience. All the women - with the possible exception of Graphina, the slave-girl - fall short of this ideal in varying degrees, and offer their own alternative standards. Since feminine virtue is such an important consideration to the characters and action of the play, modern readers have attempted to discern with which standard the play's ultimate sympathy lies. This attempt has proven contentious. Unlike a medieval morality play with its clear judgements, punishing vice and rewarding virtue, retribution does not fall evenly on all of the play's characters - by any of the expressed standards. Without such a clear guideline to help us manoeuvre through the inconsistencies and ambiguities, how should twentieth-century readers understand the contradictory messages the play presents on feminine virtue?

With this focus on the question of feminine virtue, *The Tragedy of Mariam* is inextricably enmired in the woman question debate which shared the same preoccupation. Beyond even the identical focus of the works, a comparison of Cary's

play with the pamphlets of the debate reveals a profusion of strikingly similar words, images and ideas regarding the question of feminine virtue. Such a comparison sheds valuable light on the source and significance of the standards of virtue voiced in *Mariam*. No understanding of the play's presentation of feminine virtue can be complete without an understanding of this context in which the play emerged. But the play is not simply a product of the debate, reflecting its ideologies passively. *Mariam* actively engages with those ideologies, drawing them into the play and shaping and controlling their presentation. This internalization of the debate's views on feminine virtue enables Cary's play to comment upon not simply the standards of virtue but on the debate itself - a commentary which is highly critical and succeeds in undermining the validity of the debate's founding assumptions.

Early Modern England dedicated reams of paper to discussing the "woman question". Yet, although the discussion spans more than a century and involves hundreds of contributors, it offers only an extremely limited range of conclusions. Despite the strongly polarized atmosphere of the controversy, which frequently includes venomous insults directed at the writer's opponents, the rationale on both sides of the debate is strikingly similar. Authors argue their positions either attacking or praising women drawing on the same justifications and examples. Variations between one response and another are found primarily in the minor alterations and twists that the authors make to the standard topics and examples. The reason for the severely limited scope of the debate is found in the underlying image of woman

universally accepted by the contributors on both sides of the debate. This image is composed of, first, the idea of woman as *other* and, second, a male-constructed ideal of woman intended to define that *other*.

The understanding of the idea of woman as *other* is apparent simply in the acceptance of the unspecified topic "woman" as a feasible issue for debate. Dominated by androcentric philosophies, Renaissance society perceived woman as being definitively different and unknowable. Simone de Beauvoir provides relevant insight into the male perception of woman in her study *The Second Sex*: "the categories in which men think of the world are established *from their point of view, as absolute*: they misconceive reciprocity, here as everywhere. A mystery for man, woman is considered to be mysterious in essence" (257). The nature of woman was viewed as being so foreign to the nature of man as to preclude a debate of common relevance. Instead, woman as a topic was generally addressed in isolation from other issues of pertinence to men. Henderson and McManus note that when the subject of debate addresses the other gender, men are not viewed in the capacity of *men* but are "viewed primarily as individuals or as members of a group (such as a profession, a social class, an ethnic group) rather than as representatives of their half of the human race" (3). "Woman" was debated as a generalizing topic defining the female gender in its entirety. Because of this generalized view, when the Renaissance mind turned to debate "woman" as a topic, it did so with such an all-encompassing approach as to become a discussion of the value of woman's very existence.

The manner in which the debate manifests itself in appraising this existence, however, reveals that the actual concern of the debate is significantly more limited. Consistently the pamphlets approach the issue of woman as an issue of woman's virtue. Further, the criteria by which women's virtues are judged are invariably the same. Throughout both the attacking and defending pamphlets it is the same virtues which are repeatedly the focus of concern. These are also the same virtues which were advocated in innumerable and divers media throughout the Renaissance as the ideal for women: the feminine virtues of silence, chastity and obedience[1].

This ideal functioned as a form of constructed myth in the manner which Beauvoir examines in *The Second Sex*. As Beauvoir observes, myth is a reaction against the perception of woman as *other*. The myth is created in an attempt to confine and control the *otherness* of woman with a definitive understanding.[2] A desire for a standard constructed myth is at the heart of the Renaissance woman question debate. It is affirmed by the writers in their very participation in a debate intended to evaluate "woman' as an entity. Beauvoir observes that, despite

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[1] For further examination of the promotion of this triad of virtues as a feminine ideal see Suzanne Hull. Chaste, Silent and Obedient: English Books for Women, 1475-1640. San Marino: Huntingdon Library, 1984.

[2] Beauvoir explains that although there are many different and contrasting forms of woman myths, each is "intended to sum her up *in toto*" (254). The contradictions in the constructed myths are then seen as "strange incoherencies manifested by the idea of Femininity" (254). This bafflement which Beauvoir observes over the contradictions of the constructed myths is evident in the works of the formal debate where women are repeatedly condemned for inconstancy and fickleness, attesting to the effectiveness of myth and mystery construction.

discrepancies with reality, it is the myth that is imbued with the authority of absolute truth:

> If the definition provided for this concept is contradicted by the behaviour of flesh-and-blood women, it is the latter who are wrong: we are not told that Femininity is a false entity, but that the women concerned are not feminine. The contrary facts of experience are impotent against the myth (253).

This observation is apparent in the attitude of the Renaissance debate writers. In addressing the issue of "woman," the participants actually discuss the conformity of perceivable reality to the ideal of the woman myth. On the basis of whether they are perceived to match the ideal or not, women are either praised or criticised. The virtues themselves are not questioned, but are affirmed by their use as the foundation of both sides of the issue.

Silence, chastity and obedience are not isolated ideals, but are closely associated within the Renaissance image of the proper woman - the mythic image which the debate uses as its standard of measurement. Obedience very much forms the basis for the other two virtues, being the prerequisite philosophy justifying the ideals of silence and chastity[3]. Perhaps for this reason, the pamphlets do not dedicate as much space directly to addressing obedience; the message is understood within the other concerns. Still, most of the authors feel a need to directly point out to some extent the failings or accomplishments of women in this respect. While Renaissance society demanded obedience of women within more than one domain (church, state,

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[3] Variations on the important feminine virtues such as piety, humility and constancy also presuppose the ideal of obedience.

and marriage), the arguments of the pamphlets concern themselves almost exclusively with the obedience of a woman to her husband. The failure of a woman to submit to the will of her husband was condemned by the attackers as "perverse peevishness," in the words of Thomas Nash in *The Anatomy of Absurditie*, or as "frowardness," a more frequent appellative heavily emphasized by Joseph Swetnam, and taking prominence in the title of his attack, *The Arraignment of Lewde, idle, froward, and unconstant women*. In a remark no doubt appalling to modern readers, Swetnam complains that a woman cannot be broken or restrained as even the most wild of animals may:

> A Bucke may be inclosed in a Parke, a bridle rules a horse, a Woolfe may be tyed, a Tyger may be tamed, but a froward woman will never be tamed, no spur will make hir go, nor no bridle will hold hir backe, for if a woman holde an opinion no man can draw hir from it. (2)

Swetnam denounces such willful defiance as disobedience.

In rebuttal to this accusation, the defending pamphlets, without questioning obedience as a necessary virtue, proclaim the multitude of ways in which women do submit to their husbands. The authors embark upon lists of the many ways in which women are constantly occupied in assisting and serving their husbands (tending them when sick, preparing their clothing and meals, caring for their children) for the benefit and pleasure of the men.[4] Jane Anger in *Her Protection for Women* states that, "women are the greatest help that men have, without whose aide and assistance it is as

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[4] Rachel Speght puts an ingeniously original twist on the demonstration of this virtue when she uses it to defend Eve's actions in the biblical story of the fall - a favourite for condemning women - by explaining that Eve gave Adam the apple out of "a desire to make her husband partaker of that happinesse which she thought by their eating they should both have enjoyed" (6).

possible for them to live, as if they wanted meat, drinke, clothing, or any other necessary" (B3). Edward Gosynhill confirms the same sentiment in *Mulierum Pean*, while also limiting the virtue to an exclusively feminine ideal, with the conclusion that "Thus of woman great pleasures ye have / which man to man can nat suffyce" (A4). In keeping with the style of the debate genre, the defenders confirm their statements with classical and biblical exempla. For demonstrating women's obedience, the most popular of these is the biblical Sarah, wife of the Hebrew patriarch, Abraham. Even Swetnam in *The Arraignment* acknowledges Sarah's virtuousness. *Mulierum Pean* declares Sarah a "perfyte woman," defending the description by recounting that to her husband she was "In worde and ded alwayes redy / To be obedyent hym unto" (C1). Since obedience is intrinsic to the entire image of the virtuous woman, the defenders' praise of women only confirms the necessity of a woman's suppression of her own will to that of her husband.[5]

The same confirmation of the standard virtues is apparent in the debate's treatment of feminine chastity. Above any other virtue, a woman's chastity seems to be of the greatest concern to the male attackers. Those contesting women's chastity recurrently maintain that although women pretend to be chaste, they are more lecherous than men. Nash cites an unnamed ancient philosopher who "being asked

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[5] Jane Anger attempts a virtuous justification for women not always submitting to men with her claim: "Wee are contrary to Men, because they are contrarie to that which is good" (B3). She proclaims the virtuousness of women's speech and dispositions which disagree with men by implying that these actions are in obedience to a higher standard of virtue. This stance is a precarious one, as it defies the specific manifestations of obedience without actually challenging the legitimacy of the virtue.

what was the greatest miracle in the world, saide, a chaste woman" (A2^{v}). The writers declare that women are no more chaste before marriage, when they lure men into sexual activities with their false cosmetic appearances, than they are after marriage when they deceive their husbands in numerous fashions to take lovers and turn the husbands into cuckolds, a condition for which *The Scole house* maintains there is "no payne so fervent, hote ne colde" (B3). The fear of becoming a cuckold warrants about equal attention with the fear of being enticed by a woman's 'feminine wiles'. Both fears provoke the authors to exclaim at length on the many deceptions which women use to manipulate men. One of Swetnam's many warnings against these deceptions adequately captures the essence and form of this fear:

> For women have a thousand wayes to intise thee, and ten thousand waies to deceive thee... they lay out the foldes of ther hare to entangle men into their love, betwixt their breasts is the vale of destruction, and in their beds there is hell, sorrow and repentance. (16)

Underlying this condemnation is, once again, the concern for female disobedience. The bulk of the criticism against women's lustfulness takes the form, not of condemning lust itself, but of condemning the manner in which women control men for the purposes of their lust.

In answer to such accusations the defenders proclaim women's sexual purity and chastity. They tell various stories of chaste women including Penelope, Lucretia, the Virgin Mary and, naturally, Queen Elizabeth herself. The common recourse in conjunction with such examples is to turn the accusation back around to the accuser and declare that it is men's lustful deceptions that destroy women's chastity:

> They tempt what they may to make women doe ill.
> They will tempt, and provoke, and follow us long:
> They deceive us with [wishes], and a flattering tongue.
> To make a poore Maiden a whore.
> . . . . . .
> Theyle call women whores, but their stakes they might save,
> There can be no Whore, but there must be a Knave. (Sowrenam H^{v})

In the above passage from the concluding poem in *Ester hath hang'd Haman*, Ester Sowrenam also casts suspicion on the motives of men who make such accusations against women. She continues this implication a few lines later to dismiss the claim that women deliberately allure and entrap men: "Mens thoughts being wicked they wracke on us thus, / That scandall is taken, not given by us" (H).

The power of speech to deceive is a prominent concern for both the attackers and defenders of women's chastity. The attackers claim that women use speech and flattery to allure men, and defenders claim that men use the same to seduce women. On both sides of the argument sex and speech are closely associated, united by their potential for deception. The author of *The Scole house of women*[6] mixes the imagery of speech and sex with descriptions such as "a strumpettes lyppes, are dulce as honnye" (D1). He continues the association by describing women's tricks of gaining their wishes from men by speaking to them sweetly in bed.

This last example again voices the censure of women's control over men - a criticism that is raised in many forms concerning women's speech. Throughout the

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[6] The unnamed author of the pamphlet entitled *Here Begynneth the Scole house of women* is assumed by some critics including Woodbridge to be Edward Gosynhill, the author of *Mulierum Pean*, on the basis that the two works cross-reference each other and are similar in style.

attacking pamphlets women are insulted and mocked for speaking too much and being noisy creatures who "Have tonge at large, voyce loude and shryl / Of wordes wounderous, passynge store" (*Scole house*, A2). Especially in *The Scole house* the criticism of this vice takes a more serious tone, framed as fear or suspicion of the various ways in which women use speech to control men. Apart from flattering men with sweet words, women are accused of using speech to scold, rebuke and nag their husbands, making their lives so miserable that they eventually yield to their wives' wishes. Of even greater concern in *The Scole house* is the manner in which women gather together to tell stories of their husbands and teach each other speech tricks to control them, making fools of all men.

The male defenders labour little in response to this attack, generally focusing on a woman's chastity, purity and constancy instead. Henry Cornelius Agrippa attempts a radically original defense of women's speech in *A Treatise of the Nobilitie and excellencey of woman kynde*, challenging the notion that a woman need be silent to be virtuous. Agrippa confirms the image that women speak more than men, but, on the basis that language is the gift of God which elevates humans above the animals, rationalizes that women's excessive speech is proof of their superiority to men. Agrippa's argument is a unique contribution, but whether his intention is serious or tongue-in-cheek is uncertain.[7]

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[7]Of this logic, from the author who also argued women's superior modesty on the basis of longer hair and concealed genitals, Woodbridge concludes "the argument is almost certainly facetious" (39).

Women who attempted to defend themselves against such a charge found themselves in an extremely delicate situation - a predicament many of the accusers foresaw for they rebuke in advance any woman who would prove their insults correct by giving rein to her tongue. The women defenders faced the predicament encountered by all women writers in the English Renaissance and for many years beyond: how can a woman defy the virtue of silence, even in her own defence, without destroying her own virtuousness? In order to combat such accusations, the female pamphleteers write apologies and justifications for their boldness in writing. They excuse their work as being necessary to combat the vice of the attacking pamphlets, citing the harm caused by such unchallenged remarks. They emphasize the need to defend other innocent women as well as to correct the errors of the attackers who, beyond telling lies, are blaspheming God by insulting his creation. Through this approach the women writers attempt to ally themselves with higher levels of virtue, even in the disregard of silence.

With their apologies for writing, though, these women affirmed the ideals of the silent, chaste and obedient woman. The manner in which the women writers held to the societal ideals is consistent with the observation of Elaine Beilin, in *Redeeming Eve*, that Renaissance women writers tended to work within the images rather than destroying them:

> These writers, in keeping with their era, devoted themselves to regenerating the image of women in the familiar terms of their own culture, not to imagining or advocating a different society in which all women might change their ordained feminine nature for equality with men or public power. (xvii)

The male authors who wrote in defense or praise of women also limited themselves to the familiar terms and images of Renaissance society. While the women writers offered a new challenge to this image simply through the act of writing, their devotion to the familiar images severely limited the scope of the debate, resulting in merely a confirmation of the ideals of the woman myth which emerged primarily unchallenged, and certainly unscathed, from the century of conflict.

It is in this respect that Elizabeth Cary's play *The Tragedy of Mariam* offers a unique insight into the debate. By employing a different genre, Cary's play is able to address the question of feminine virtue without being obliged to accept the constricting myth requisite to the formal debate. As a result, *Mariam* breaks through the confines which hampered the works of women writers such as Anger, Speght, Sowrenam and Munda. Since the play, unlike the defences, is not contained within this prescribed image of woman, it is able to turn upon that image in order to examine it. The genre of drama facilitates this examination by providing a medium in which the woman myth can be reproduced and a context within which that myth can be evaluated. Cary's play, therefore, inverts the perspective of the woman question debate: *Mariam* evaluates the validity of the myth by the standards of reality; the debate evaluates the worth of real women by the authority of the myth.

An important element in effecting this inversion is the centering of the play on the female characters. When Elizabeth Cary composed *The Tragedy of Mariam* she based it on the account of the relationship between King Herod and Queen Mariamme

narrated in Josephus's *Jewish Antiquities*[8]. One of the primary changes that she made to her source story was transferring the focus of the story from Herod to Mariam. In Josephus's version, Mariam and the other women of the play are only supporting characters who figure in the longer history of Herod's life. The characterization of the women in *Jewish Antiquities* is fairly superficial. They are presented in the same roles in which the attacking pamphlets of the debate cast women: deceptive flirts and domineering scolds. With minimal delving into characterization, Josephus brushes away Mariamne's motives with the labelling of the pamphlets. Along with her mother Alexandra she is presented as being stereotypically deceptive for having "with prettie presents and feminine flatteries mollified and wroght" Sohemus to reveal Herod's orders (qtd in Weller 277). She is described as having a natural "frowardnesse" (qtd in Weller 279). Likewise her description fits the standard portrait of the vociferous domineering scold, for she upbraids and reproaches the king's mother and sister as well as the king himself. The actions of the other female characters are generally dismissed with an equally standard portrayal of women's mythic vices. Simone de Beauvoir observes that, "the myth is one of those snares of false objectivity into which the man who depends on ready-made valuations rushes head-long" (261). Josephus's version of the story relies on these "ready-made valuations" in the same manner that the debate attacks do. The characterization of the women is external and superficial, but so is their function in the story. The story revolves around Herod so the design in

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[8] It is believed that Cary's major source for *Mariam* was the Thomas Lodge's first English translation of *Jewish Antiquities* which was printed in 1602.

presenting the women, the same as the other minor male characters, is to enhance and explain his story. When Cary moved the female characters from the periphery to the centre of the story, she eliminated their role as *other* by granting them the subject perspective on the story.

This transference of the subjective perspective of the story to Mariam allows the reader the insight into the character and psychology of a woman which was not possible within the structure of either the debate pamphlets or the male-focused account of the story in *Jewish Antiquities*. In "Elizabeth Cary and *The Tragedie of Mariam*" Elaine Beilin makes note of "the unusual prominence given to a virtuous woman's psychological conflicts" (48). Mariam's psychological conflict is the dramatization of the clash between the reality and perception of virtue.

The tragedy of Mariam's story arises from this conflict of reality and perception. Mariam is accused of and executed for a crime of which she is innocent. The triad of feminine virtues - silence, chastity and obedience - again makes its appearance as a preoccupation of the characters in the play. In the course of the play, Mariam succeeds in upholding only chastity, though ironically it is for the suspected transgression of this virtue that she loses her life. Her downfall is precipitated by the actions of the king's sister, Salome, against her, and - by Mariam's own admission - not averted by her own unwillingness to defend herself with the use of deception. The accusations are deemed credible, however, because of overlapping association of the virtues of silence and chastity - an overlap founding many of the accusations in the pamphlets of the woman question debate. It is because Mariam is guilty of speech

that she is believed guilty of unfaithfulness. Herod accepts this association and uses it to justify Mariam's execution, although he vacillates between believing and denying her actual unchastity. With the rationale that because her speech was free her affections (or possibly body) were as well, Herod confirms the order for her death: "'tis so: she's unchaste, / Her mouth will ope to ev'ry stranger's ear" (4.7.433-4). The same association is reconfirmed by the Chorus who denounces a woman's speech to any other than her husband, declaring that "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" (3.3.242-4), and by Constabarus who chastises the same action in his wife, Salome, warning her that "A stranger's private conference is shame" (1.6.377). Under this association Mariam's condemnation, if not technically just, is fitting. Mariam is guilty of speaking privately with a man other than her husband. If the play confirms that violation of speech and chastity are the same crime, her execution is appropriate.

But the association is validated only through the denunciations of the Chorus and some of the characters. The context in which these words are contained undermines the association. As Elaine Beilin effectively argues in "Elizabeth Cary," the conflict between the acceptance and approbation of Mariam's actions is resolved with Cary's transfiguration of the heroine into a Christ figure, an image not appearing in Josephus. The description of Mariam's death by the Nuntio contains numerous images to turn Mariam's death into an allegory of the crucifixion of Christ: Mariam is associated with the symbol of resurrection, the Phoenix (5.1.24); she is reviled and rebuked by her mother (5.1.33-36) as Christ was by the multitude; she predicts Herod

will desire her resurrection in three days time (5.1.77-8), the span of time before Christ's resurrection; and paralleling the suicide of Judas Iscariot, the butler who betrayed Mariam is found to have hanged himself on a tree (5.1.109-110). With this imagery of Mariam's death, the conclusion of the play undermines the validity of the accusations against her, not only for Herod, who then realizes her innocence, but also for the reader. As Margaret Ferguson says: "*The Tragedie of Mariam* subjects the concept of female chastity to severe scrutiny and goes a long way toward unravelling the logic which binds 'chastity' to 'silence' and 'obedience' " (41).

The Tragedy of Mariam unravels those bindings not only within the play through dramatizing the failure of this logic in the example of Mariam, but also, by extension of the parallel philosophies, in the external woman question debate. The words and myths of the debate reappear in *Mariam* incorporated into the speeches of the characters and the Chorus. The curses against Mariam accuse her of the same duplicitous sexual scheming that is such a prominent fear in the attacking pamphlets. Salome makes effective use of the exact sentiments expressed by Swetnam to incite the fear and anger of Herod against Mariam. Playing on the standard image of the entrapping allure of women's beauty, she turns her brother's praise of the beauty of Mariam's hair into a familiar image of entrapment: "...she lays them out for nets, / To catch the hearts that do not shun a bait/.... Mariam's very tresses hide deceit" (4.7.417-20). Swetnam's generalized declaration about women that "they lay out the foldes of ther hare to entangle men into their love" (16) is strikingly similar. Likewise, Swetnam warns his male readers that "if thou suffer thy selfe to be lead into fooles

paradice, (that is to say) the bed or closet wherein a woman is, (then I say) thou art like a bird snared in a lime bush, which the more she striveth the faster she is" (35); Salome remarks that Mariam's cheek is a "crimson bush, that ever limes" (4.7.401). *Mariam* also repeats the frequent image of beauty hiding evil. Nash claims that women "carrie Angels in their faces to entangle men and devils in their devices" (A3). Swetnam confirms the image: "...many women are in shape Angells, but in quallities Devills..." (30). Believing that Mariam attempted to poison him, Herod denounces her repeatedly with the same words: "A beautous body hides a loathsome soul" (4.4.178); "...thine eye / Is pure as Heaven, but impure thy mind" (4.4.190-1); "...Hell itself lies hid / Beneath thy heavenly show" (4.4.203-4) [9].

These accusations against Mariam are ironic, however, as the reader is aware that it is precisely this form of deception that Mariam has consciously rejected. Only a few lines prior to Herod's tirade against beauty's deception, Mariam asserts: "I cannot frame disguise, nor never taught / My face a look dissenting from my thought" (4.3.145-6). The insight into the accused woman's psyche confirms for the reader the injustice of the accusations. The reader is only aware of the irony of these accusations, however, because they appear within the context of the play. The reader of the

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[9] The image of painted beauty is also recurrent: Herod calls Mariam a "painted devil," (4.4.175); Swetnam compares women to "painted ships" (3); Constabarus calls Salome "a painted sepulchre/... fill'd with worse than rotten bones" (2.4.325-8); Swetnam calls women "painted coffins with rotten bones" (30), both adaptations of the biblical verse "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness." (Matthew 24: 27).

attacks against women in the formal controversy is not provided with this context. The numerous echoes of the words and images of the debate throughout *Mariam* allude outwards to the views being perpetuated in the pamphlets of the seventeenth century. The invalidation of the parallel words within the context of the play draws attention to the absence of a context to the debate which could either confirm or refute the claims. By proving context to be vitally significant to the interpretation of the words within the play, *Mariam* undermines the validity of the words of the debate which appear without context.

In addition to illustrating the incongruity between accusations and reality, the play illustrates the incongruity within the very ideal of virtuousness. Herod's and Salome's charges against Mariam's deceptiveness are presented with dramatic irony, not only because the reader is aware that Mariam has consciously rejected using deception, but also because the reader is all too aware that her rejection of this much denounced vice precipitates her condemnation. With the insight we have into her thoughts as the central character, Mariam's understanding of her imminent fate is apparent. Although she realizes that using deception would be her most effective defense, she chooses to remain innocent of such a vice: "I know I could enchain him with a smile: / And lead him captive with a gentle word, / I scorn my look should ever man beguile, / Or other speech than meaning to afford" (3.3.163-166). Mariam's belief that her "innocence is hope enough" (3.3.180) proves to be a futile conviction - at least towards the end of preserving her life. Laurie J. Shannon observes, in "*The Tragedie of Mariam*: Cary's Critiques of the Terms of Founding Social Discourses,"

that within the established ideology of Mariam's society "dissembling and beguiling conduct are regarded as consistent with a woman's chastity" (152). Herod certainly supports such an understanding of woman's virtue when he promises Mariam that he will "all unkind conceits exile" if she will only smile despite her anger (4.3.144) . The severe criticism of dissembling and beguiling within the play, combined with the revelation that these practices are necessary for a woman to maintain the appearance of chastity, reveal that the standards of judging a woman's chastity and virtue within the play are inherently inconsistent. The play's repetition of the same denunciations presented in the pamphlets extends the criticism of inconsistency to the woman question debate as well.

While the mimetic presentation of the play demonstrates the injustice of Mariam's death and the inconsistencies of the criticising standards, the Chorus adamantly refuses to question the validity of its own condemnations. Barry Weller and Margaret Ferguson in the introduction to their edition of *The Tragedy of Mariam* observe the incongruous attitudes of the Chorus towards the action of the play: "their gnomic conventional utterances seem somewhat off the mark, not only capricious and volatile in the application of general precepts but also inadequate to the psychological, spiritual, or even practical situation of the protagonist" (35). If the Chorus's sentiments are not compatible with the reader's, they are with the philosophies of the attacking pamphlets. The discrepancy alienates the views of the Chorus, and hence of the attacks, from the reader.

From their first appearance, the Chorus's responses seem to be derived more from Renaissance stereotypes of women than from the action of the play itself. The Chorus of the first act surprises the reader by summarizing Mariam's initial turmoil as the result of a "wavering mind" (1.6.498). Mariam's opening soliloquy has evoked a much more complicated impression of her turmoil as she struggles to reconcile her conflicting emotions about the death of a master who denied her freedom and committed abhorrent acts while professing his love for her. Her conflict arises not from the fluctuations within her own mind, but from the inherently contradictory position between love and hate, obedience and independence of mind in which her marriage places her. The Chorus's admonition would seem much more applicable to Salome, especially when in the immediately preceding scene she declares her desire to switch husbands once again, a desire which prompts Constabarus to comment on Salome's "wavering thoughts" (1.6.474). But Salome remains unrebuked throughout the commentary. Instead, with a thoroughly inappropriate and inadequate analysis of Mariam's psychological dilemma, the Chorus censures that "her wishes guide her to she knows not what" (526), depicting her reason surrendered to her desires. The chorus concludes by pronouncing on the unhappiness of those "That care for nothing being in their power" (528). Dismissing the validity of her turmoil as merely vacillating desires, the Chorus depicts her in a fashion corresponding to the image of the inconstancy of woman found throughout the attacking pamphlets. Swetnam presents a picture of woman analogous to the Chorus's:

> It is wonderfull to see the madd feates of women, for she will now be merry then againe sad; now laugh then weepe, now sick then presently whole, all things which like not them is naught, and it be never so bad if it like them it is excellent, againe it is death for a woman to be denied the thing which they demaund (11).

Nash affirms the opinion, declaring that "constancie will sooner inhabite the body of a Camelion, a Tyger or a Wolfe, then the hart of a woman" (iii^{v}).

The Chorus of the fourth act also begins with a commentary of general censure against vices of which more than one of the characters are guilty. In this act they admonish Mariam for not having "scorn'd to leave a due unpaid" (659), asserting that she would have lived a long life if she had forgiven Herod - for the murder of her grandfather and brother as well as the orders for her own death - and "paid her love" to him. The harshness of this judgement levelled against Mariam seems absurd when both Salome and Herod are guilty of seeking greater vengence for less cause. The Chorus's sentiments do not match the situation as it has been presented, but once again, they echo the censures of the pamphlets. Gosynhill describes the many ways in which women counsel each other in their "schole house of women" to revenge themselves on the wrong-doings of their husbands. The lessons on disobedience include those used by Mariam: chiding their husbands and forsaking their beds. Swetnam remarks on the stubbornness of women when they are in such a froward and proud temper: "if thou goe about to master a woman in hope to bring hir to humility, there is no way to make hir good with stripes except thou beate hir to death..." (C3). By conferring the blame for Mariam's death on her own stubbornness and pride, the Chorus alarmingly sanctions this sentiment.

The crucial judgement of Mariam by the Chorus occurs at the end of the third act. Although in the fifth act, after her death, the Chorus refers to Mariam inconsistently, or perhaps hypocritically, as "guiltless" (272), their proclamations in the third act are never revoked. It is these proclamations which have gained so much critical attention. The philosophies of the Chorus in the third act justify Mariam's punishment, first, by asserting the equivalence of "a common body" and "a common mind" (244), and, second, by declaring that ensuring the appearance of virtue is a necessary aspect of *being* virtuous: "'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" (215-17). No doubt Swetnam would have found Mariam's death, if not justifiable, certainly not the fault of any but the woman herself, for he confirms that the difference between appearance and actuality is minimal: "It behoveth every woman to have a great regard to her behaviour, and to keepe her selfe out of the fier knowing that a woman of suspected chastity liveth but in miserable case, for there is but small difference by being naught and being thought naught" (54).

The play pivots on the delicate balance between appearance and reality. The words of the Chorus reflect the attitudes of Renaissance society found in the woman debate regarding this balance. In "The *Femme Covert* in Elizabeth Cary's *Mariam*," Betty S. Travitsky concludes that this attitude is also the thesis of the play. She asserts that Mariam's death in spite of her physical chastity, reinforced by the pronouncements of the Chorus, "underlines Cary's thesis that physical chastity alone is inadequate in the wife" (189). Travitsky sees this as evidence of the "internalization

of negative imagery and of patriarchal constructs of women..." and "the pervasiveness of the patriarchal attitudes that underlay and determined women's place in Renaissance English society" (192). Still, Travitsky admits that, in light of stances in Cary's own life, her attitude towards wifely subordination is ambivalent.

Nancy A. Gutierrez also notes the ambivalence of the play's presentation of feminine virtue in "Valuing *Mariam*: Genre Study and Feminist Analysis". She considers but discards the idea of *Mariam* being a "subversive document," on account of the ambiguity and open-endedness of the play which undercuts either a firm commendation or censure of Mariam's actions. Instead, Guiterrez postulates the interesting theory that the play is a form of debate "in which the resolution of the plot is left open-ended, to be made complete by audience response" (246).

I have been contending that the play already is engaged in a debate. The premises of the woman debate which *Mariam* responds to need to be considered in order to analyze the significance of the play's stance on feminine virtue. Travitsky is correct in noticing the evidence of patriarchal attitudes in Cary's play. As I have demonstrated, these attitudes expressed through the voices of the Chorus and other characters imitate the attitudes of Renaissance society expressed in the debate of the woman question. But these attitudes are not advocated by the play; they are merely contained within it. What has been considered the ambiguity of the play's attitude towards feminine virtue is the internal discord between the values verbally professed through characters and those dramatized through the sympathetic presentation of Mariam's tragedy. Examining the action and the words of the Chorus, Weller and

Ferguson hit upon the significance of this discord: "the disparity between the moral adages of the Chorus and the experiences of the heroine (and perhaps, by extension, the bad fit between conventional wisdom and the experiences of all women) seems to be at the very heart of Cary's dramatic vision (38)". The extension of the 'bad fit' to all women is most definitely at the heart of Cary's dramatic vision. Comparing Cary's play to responses written by other women as a part of the formal woman question debate reveals that *Mariam* does not exhibit the "internalization of patriarchal attitudes". In fact, it is precisely this internalization that Cary's play avoids and, more importantly, queries.

The original approach which *Mariam* contributes to the debate is a radical shift in perspective - a shift which enables the play to overcome the limits faced by other defence writers. Rather than being primarily concerned with commending or criticizing the actions of Mariam herself, the play draws attention to the actions and philosophies of the society surrounding Mariam. The significance of Cary's approach is that the play focuses not fundamentally on the issue of women's virtue, but on the issue of the judgement and perception of woman's virtue; the play is concerned not as much with the conclusions of the debate writers but with the validity of the practice to begin with. Current criticism on *Mariam* has generally not made this same shift. Recurrently, critics are concerned with interpreting the play's judgement on the female characters and ignore the judgement which it directs at society. As a result little attention has been given to realizing that the 'ambiguities' of the play - the points of inconsistency and discord - are the sites of social critique.

CHAPTER TWO

THE ARGUMENT: AUTHORITY

I am ashamed, that women are so simple
To offer war, where they should kneel for peace;
Or seek for rule, supremacy and sway,
When they are bound to serve, love and obey.
- Katharina in *The Taming of the Shrew*

Perhaps in part, critics have tended to read in *The Tragedy of Mariam* earnest support for the conventional notion of feminine virtue because of the substantial forum the play allots to the justification of this ideal. The conventional image of feminine virtue is not simply proclaimed; it is backed by a paradigm of authority which is hierarchically structured and divinely ordained. Most emphatically, this paradigm is used to advocate the feminine virtue of obedience, denying women direct access to power and the enactment of their own will. Although the Chorus and many other characters affirm this paradigm - including, eventually, Mariam herself - the dramatic structure of the play unfolds to ultimately undermine it. Rather than bolstering support for the traditional feminine ideal, the inclusion of the backing paradigm allows Cary's play to extend its critique to the very foundation of the conventional ideology. Employing the same technique that invalidated the Jacobean perception of virtue, *The Tragedy of Mariam* challenges this paradigm of authority. Again, we can observe that Cary's play re-presents the conventional ideology apparent in the pamphlets of the woman question debate, only to dramatize its flaws and its limitations by the standards

of reality. Regarding the issue of authority, *Mariam* additionally demonstrates that the denial of direct access to power for women actually results antithetically in women gaining superior power through indirect means - power which is directed toward malice and personal gain.

In understanding the methodology which Cary's play uses to form its critique, the observations of Laura Levine about the theatre debate are insightful. During approximately the same period of time in which the women question debate raged in print, another "pamphlet war" was being waged regarding the morality of the theatre. In *Men in Women's Clothing*, Levine explains that one of the crucial issues struggled with in this debate was the suspicion that theatre effeminized the boys who played women's parts and could possibly have a similar effect upon the audience. One writer, Phillip Stubbes, claimed that this transvestite practice could actually "adulterate" the male gender (Levine 10). Despite this attack against their art, Levine notes that Renaissance dramatists wrote scenes which would seemingly support the claim that transvestism could alter gender. Reflecting on the scene in Shakespeare's *Anthony and Cleopatra* where Cleopatra reminisces about switching clothing with a drunken Anthony, Levine wonders, "Why would a dramatist invoke such a moment? Not merely "invoke" but embody and heighten precisely the attack launched against his own craft?" (1). Levine concludes that the inclusion of such scenes is part of a movement of what she terms "*anti*-anti-theatricality" and provides a method for responding to and "working out" the fears present in anti-theatrical attacks (136).

Similarly, Cary's play invokes the very criticisms levelled against women.

Rather than denying the fears of women's control expressed in the debate of the woman question, *The Tragedy of Mariam* is populated with female characters who appear to have stepped straight from the pages of the most critical of attacking pamphlets. They violate all the prescribed feminine virtues of silence, chastity and obedience. Doris is almost singularly characterised by her vengeful and proud cursing. The two scenes in which she appears are filled with her lengthy and venomous invectives, in the first vowing revenge for the wrongs Mariam's marriage to Herod caused her (2.3) and in the second directly cursing Mariam before her execution (4.8.609-624). Alexandra as well makes her mark primarily through her scolding voice as she upbraids her daughter, Mariam, as she proceeds towards her execution (5.1.33-36). Cleopatra makes her appearance in the story only through reference by Mariam, who portrays her as a deceitful wanton "wholly set on gain" (4.8.538), and who dismisses the prospect of living "like to Cleopatra", opting instead to "with purest body...press [her] tomb" (1.2.200-1).

However, Salome dominates the role of the wicked woman. Constabarus, who Weller notes plays the role of her own private chorus enumerating the many vices and crimes which she performs during the course of the play (37), designates her the "leader" of "adulterous, murderous, cunning, proud" women (4.6.334). True to such a title, she leads in violating the feminine virtues, disregarding each of the sanctioned triad of silence, chastity and obedience - generally on more than one occasion even within the course of the play. The sustained attention the drama gives to Salome above any of the others portrays her in a manner most closely reflective of the

accusations of the pamphlets. She herself admits the inconstancy of her "wand'ring heart" that has twice urged her to leave one husband for another (1.4.321). Salome's actions confirm *The Scole house*'s warnings to men that "Have you ones turned, your iye and backe / An other she wyl have, to smycke and smacke" (A3). Defying the other virtues, Salome is proud and certainly not silent. Repeatedly she uses her speech and cunning to gain her desires, whether it is marriage to her latest love or the vengeful death of those who prevent the attainment of her goals. She commits the ultimate crime of wifely disobedience twice in securing the deaths of her first two husbands, a crime of uniquely grave proportions in the Renaissance termed "petty treason" as it reverses the hierarchical order of authority[1].

This last example of Salome's vice points clearly to the fear underlying the pamphlet attacks: inversion of the structure of authority. Invariably the dreaded situation arising from women's rejection of traditional virtues is female mastery. Thomas Nash warns against marrying a rich wife for precisely this reason for "shee wyll not be content to be a wife, but will be a Maister or Mistresse, in commaunding, chiding, correcting and controlling" ($A2^{v}$). The condition which Nash describes reflects the anxiety at the root of all these criticisms. The alarming pictures which the pamphlets constantly portray are women controlling their husbands: the stubborn woman who refuses to submit to her husbands' will, the lustful wanton who cuckolds

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[1] The statute of treasons in force from 1352 until 1828 defines petty treason as "when a servant slayeth his master, or a wife her husband, or when a man secular or religious slayeth his prelate to whom he oweth obedience" (*Statutes* 2: 51-52, quoted in Travitsky, "Husband-Murder" 172-3).

her husband, the deceitful wife who uses sex or flattery to con her husband into giving in to her will, or the scolding wife who verbally berates her husband to gain her way[2]. The central triad of feminine virtues protects against exactly these forms of feminine control: silence defies a woman's verbal control, chastity prevents a woman's sexual control, and obedience suppresses a woman's will. Maintaining the virtues a woman maintains her subordination to her husband; violating the virtues she usurps the authority of men. Woodbridge notes that Renaissance literature abandoned the traditional "temptress/ saint dichotomy" and replaced it with the opposing images of "the Patient Grissill figure and the aggressive, liberty minded woman, either a shrew or whore" (211). The pamphlets certainly confirm this preoccupation. If chastity had formerly been the primary concern, the Renaissance pamphlets subsumed it under the banner of obedience and coupled it with the concern for silence. These pamphlets do not condemn women as temptresses to condemn sex, but to condemn women's use of sex. The two denounced Renaissance types - the shrew and the whore - attest to the power inherent in a woman's rejection of silence and chastity. The overwhelming message of the attacking pamphlets is that if women do not adhere to the virtues of silence, chastity and obedience, they will gain power over men.

The defending pamphlets generally reject the accusation that women usurp male power with their confirmations of women's adherence to the virtues. Women do

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[2] I have cited specific references to these various types in Chapter One. The images are so numerous and so consistent, however, that they can be found throughout any of the attack pamphlets.

not force their will on their husbands but are their willing and obedient assistants. Women do not use sex to gain their will from men but only submit to sex out of duty to their husbands and for purposes of procreation. Women do not seek carnal pleasures from men but are the victims of men's seductions. Of the examined texts, only Jane Anger admits to women's attempts to control men. She claims that this is done, though, to curb men's sinfulness:

> Our tongues are light, because earnest in reproving mens filthy vices, and our good counsel is termed nipping injurie, in that it accordes not with their foolish fancies. Our boldness rash, for giving Noddies nipping answeres, our dispositions naughtie, for not agreeing with their vilde mindes, and our furie dangerous, because it will not beare with their knavish behaviours. If our frownes be so terrible, and our anger so deadly, men are too foolish in occasions of hatred, which shunned, a terrible death is prevented (B3^{v}).

While Anger admits that women may disobey their husbands in these respects, she justifies it as obedience to virtue itself; their disobedience is, therefore, ultimately in the service of saving men's souls.

The Tragedy of Mariam offers neither of these defences for the vices of the female characters. Rather it confirms that the women defy virtue in order to gain their own will and control men in the process. In fact, Cary's drama succeeds in depicting women's manipulation of men more vividly and more convincingly than any of the pamphlets accomplish. Throughout the play the female characters plot, scheme and generally succeed at gaining their will through manipulating men. Their tools in usurping power are the attributes which virtue attempts to keep in check: language and sex. Alexandra early in the play claims she could have arranged the death of Herod

by tempting Anthony with Mariam's beauty. Salome makes use of both her brothers to incite the death of her husband, Constabarus, that she might marry Silleus, and then the execution of Mariam out of revenge and hatred. Before she succeeds in these plots, her power to accomplish such deeds is attested to by the death of her previous husband, Joseph, whom she overthrew to marry the now-hated Constabarus. Alexandra, who is less successful in accomplishing her goals, still attempts to gain the favour of Herod through turning against her condemned daughter and loudly rebuking Mariam's disobedience to her husband. Mariam, who refuses to make use of such deceit, still acknowledges the power of language and sex to control men when she reflects: "I know I could enchain him with a smile: / And lead him captive with a gentle word" (3.3.163-64).

In Cary's version of the story, Mariam rejects the use of the "feminine flatteries" which she is described as exploiting in Josephus's account. Cary's alteration portrays Mariam as far more innocent than the Mariamme of the *Antiquities*, an alteration which works to challenge the perception of virtue. With the characters of Salome and Cleopatra, however, Cary actually enhances the portrayal of their vices. Betty S. Travitsky notes, but offers no conclusions about, the fact that Cary omits all examples of Cleopatra's sympathy for and attempts to assist Mariam and Alexandra (*The Femme Covert* 189). The events in *Jewish Antiquities* which Cary omits include Cleopatra's acceptance of Alexendra's plea for help and offer of sanctuary to her and

her son in Egypt (15.2.2)[3]. *Mariam* makes no positive references to Cleopatra at all. Instead her portrayal is akin to that of the pamphlets where she is a favourite example of vanity, lust and deception. Mariam scorns "false" Cleopatra's "allurements, all her courtly guile, / Her smiles, her favours, and her smooth deceit" (4.8.542-2). Thomas Nash notes the same vanity in *The Anatomie of Absurditie:* "Cleopatra according to Xiphilinus judgement, was not slaine with venimous Snakes, but with the bodkin that she curled her hayre" *(A4v)*. Weller and Ferguson observe another enhancement in Cary's story. According to Josephus, Salome is already widowed from Constabarus before she meets Silleus (158)[4]. Cary's alteration adds an unprecedented dimension of inconstancy and lust to Salome's character.

In a play which challenges the attacks on women's virtue, the confirmation and deliberate enhancement of women's vice prompts a question similar to Levin's: Why would Cary not merely "invoke" but embody and heighten precisely the attack launched against her own sex? In answer we can turn again to the conclusion that Levine offers. The inclusion of anti-theatricality, Levine claims, allows for a "working out" of the fears. As regards *Mariam*, this inclusion goes beyond "working out" the fears of women's control to challenging the paradigm which attempts to prevent it.

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[3] For examples of Cleopatra's sympathy for Mariam and her family see book 15: 2.5,6 and 3.2,5,8.

[4] See *Jewish Antiquities* 16.7.6: "Having come to Herod on some business or other, [Syllaeus] saw Salome and set his heart on having her. And as he knew she was a widow, he spoke to her about his feeling. Salome, who . . . regarded the young man with anything but indifference, was eager for marriage with him. . ." (Lodge 297).

The final effect of the negative images in *Mariam* is not simply the obvious surface effect of validating the attacks on women. When considered within the larger context of the play's engagement with the issues, language and philosophies of the woman question debate, the presence of feminine vice in the drama challenges the validity and dramatizes the consequences of the traditional ideology prescribing the virtues of silence, chastity and obedience to women.

In presenting their views of women - and, thereby, promoting the traditional paradigm of authority - the pamphlets frequently reveal the nature and understood justifications of that paradigm. Repeatedly, the writers turn to a belief in natural order to explain either the inherent virtue or vice of women. These explanations are sometimes articulated as serious interpretations of scripture or the writings of classical philosophers; other times they are written as jesting original or folkloric anecdotes or humorous twists on the biblical and classical writings. In either vein, whether to praise or attack, the emphasis in explaining women's behaviour is to seek out its source in stories of creation. The author of *The Scole house*, for example, relates a number of humorous stories to explain the qualities of women. In one story he tells how a man followed the instructions of the devil to provide a tongue for his tongueless wife by placing an aspen leaf in her mouth. From that day forward she never stopped ranting and scolding him. The story concludes by connecting the source of women's vociferousness to the constant shaking of the aspen leaves:

> And by profe, daylye we se
> What inclynacyon, nature maketh
> The aspyn lefe, hangynge where it be

> With lytell wynde, or none it shaketh
> A womans tonge, in lyke wyse taketh
> Lyttel ease, and little rest (C1-^{v}).

Drawing on the biblical creation story, *The Scole house* attributes women's stubbornness to the crooked, stiff and sturdy characteristics of the bone from which they were made. The same work further explains women's talkativeness from their origin in bone, for if two bones are shaken together in a bag they will clitter and clatter as women do when they gather together. This pamphlet continues on to give the story one further original twist by claiming that woman was not actually made from the rib of Adam, as a dog ran off with the bone. Instead God made woman out of the dog's rib, from which the author explains the nature of a woman resembles a dog in that she "at her husbande, doth barke and ball / As doth the curre, for nought at all" (D4^{v} -C1). In his explanations, the author reveals a faith in immutable order, that humans inherently possess and are unable to change the characteristics with which they were supposedly created.

The Scole house takes a humorous twist on the biblical creation story to explain women's vices of frowardness and talkativeness, but the implications of the Christian creation story are an important element which the defenders of women have to account for in their arguments. The story of woman's creation from the rib of man was a crucial element for justifying female subordination, if not inferiority, in Christian societies. While the author of *The Scole house* makes light of the story, the defenders, especially those who are women, interpret the creation with serious purpose. Relying on the same sense of divine ordinance, the defenders draw various conclusions

conclusions about the nature of woman from this story. As the woman debate subsumes the virtues of silence and chastity under the primary virtue of obedience, the justification for the hierarchy of genders takes on crucial importance in maintaining the image of woman. One of the common arguments put forward by, among others, Agrippa, Anger, Speght and Sowrenam is that women are superior, being formed of superior elements: "Then lacking a help for him, GOD making woman of mans fleshe, that she might bee purer then he, doth evidently showe, how far we women are more excelent then men" (Anger C). The tone and rationale of the explanation differs greatly from that in *The Scole house*, but both resort to attributing to women the quality of the substance of which they are made. This is a characteristic which is repeated on both sides of the debate: the true nature of woman is viewed as being bound in her original creation.

Despite her claim for women's superiority, Anger still affirms that woman is intended as a 'help' for man. Anger argues around this intention and the undeniable biblical ordinance of women's subjection to men (Genesis 3:16) with an innovative tactic. She claims that "the Gods", realizing women's superior virtues, gave men superiority over them to prevent the women from becoming proud and being damned for such a sin ($B2^{v}$). Ester Sowrenam also develops a strategy around the creational hierarchy by claiming that women were made subject to men only to increase their glory: "Obedience is better than Sacrifice: for nothing is more acceptable before God then to obey: women are much bound to God, to have so acceptable a vertue enjoyned them for their pennance" (9-10). Sowrenam returns to arguing the qualities of woman

from the attributes of her creation, however, in a manner which affirms the natural position of woman is in obedient assistance to man. Claiming that "every creature doth corresponde the temper and the inclination of that element wherein it hath tooke his first and principall *esse*, or being", Sowrenam concludes that woman, who was created in paradise " a place of all delight and pleasure," always provides man with delight and pleasure (6). She further draws the conclusion that since woman was made from Adam's rib near his heart she helps with all joys and concerns in his heart.

Repeatedly throughout the attacking and praising tracts, the obedience of woman to man is confirmed as an attribute of nature arising out of creation. Whether attempting to argue the virtue or vice of women, their superiority or inferiority, authors confirm this hierarchical structure according men authority over women. Describing how Renaissance society was "heavily concerned with questions of order and decree", Travitsky quotes a passage from "An exhortation, concernynge good order and obedience, to rulers and Majestrates" which accurately encapsulates the accepted paradigm of authority revealed in the debate:

> Every degree of people in theyr vocacion, callyng and office, hath appointed to them theyr duetie and order. Some are in hyghe degree, some in lowe, some kynges and prynces, some inferiours and subjectes, pryestes, and laymen, maysters and servauntes, fathers and chyldren; husbandes and wyves, ryche and poore, and every one have nede of other: so that in all thynges is to be lauded and praysed the goodlye ordre of god, without the whych, no house, no Citye, no common wealth, can contynue and indure or last (Nv-N1, quoted in *Husband-Murder* 174-75).

The theory that positions whether high or low are all part of the accepted order enabled the defenders to accept women's subservience without conceding to their

inferiority of character. The passage also confirms this system, as do the pamphleteers, as the proper and natural ordained order.

When applying this hierarchy to the relations between the genders, nowhere is this natural order more strongly advocated than in the pamphlets of the transvestite controversy. During the same period of time in which the formal controversy of the woman question was being waged, pamphlets on the related issue of transvestism were being written and published. Two of the most noteworthy of these were published during the years of the Swetnam controversy: *Hic Mulier,* which attacked women for adopting masculine clothing, and *Haec-Vir,* which responded by attacking men's effeminate dress. Both works offer strong criticism and ridicule to individuals who assume not only the garments, but the mannerisms and speech of the opposite gender.

The source of offense is clear in both works: adopting the characteristics of the other gender threatens the societal (possibly cosmic) structure deemed to have been ordained by God and nature. In *Hic Mulier* the mannish-woman receives a lengthy cursing which targets her unnaturalness for transgressing the structured order of nature or kinde:

> It is all base, all barbarous. Base in respect it offends man in the example, and God in the most unnatural use: Barbarous in that it is exorbitant from Nature and an *Antithesis* to kinde; going astray (with ill-favoured affectation) both in attire, in speech, in manners (B).

Further she is accused of "High treason to God and nature" (B^{v}). She is described as a "monstrous deformitie" stranger and more odious than any creatures ever made or imagined (A4). With their transgression of gender roles the Hic-Mulier women are

accused of transgressing virtue. They are admonished for having

> cast off the ornaments of your sexes, to put on the garments of Shame; that have laid by the bashfulnesse of your natures, to gather the impudence of Harlots; that have buried silence, to revive slander; that are all things but that which you should be, and nothing lesse then friends to vertue and goodnesse (A4).

Both the *Hic Mulier* and the *Haec Vir* pamphlets maintain that there needs to be a distinction between man and woman in their dress as well as their actions. As a result, gender distinctions also need to be maintained in what constitutes virtuous behaviour. The sin is not viewed in the actions or dress themselves, but in their adoption by the wrong gender.

As to why transgressing gender roles is of such concern in Renaissance debate, Laura Levine again provides potential insight in *Men in Women's Clothing*. Levine sees at the heart of the fear of effeminization a basic doubt about the fundamental categories of gender. Such doubt can be consoled by a fixed system of signs such as the one espoused in *Statues*, the same one being violated by the Hic-Mulier / Haec Vir phenomenon, and the one underlying the naturally ordained explanations in the pamphlets of the woman question controversy. As Levine explains:

> The consolation offered by a faith in referentiality must be that it generalizes: if we live in a world where 'signs' always lead inevitably to things, then those things must be fixed, always what they are and unsusceptible to change. And if we live in a world in which this is so, then one of the things that must be fixed and unsusceptible to change is gender itself. (6)

It is precisely such a system of fixed referentiality that Constabarus relies on in denouncing his wife Salome's plans to usurp male prerogative and divorce him. With

his rebuttal he evokes the images of the transvestite controversy, as well as both sides of the woman question debate which maintained the necessary hierarchy and distinction between genders for fear of the world being turned "up-so-doun":

> 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.
> Let fishes graze, beasts [swim], and birds descend,
> Let fire burn downwards whilst the earth aspires:
> Let winter's heat and summer's cold offend,
> Let thistles grow on vines and grapes on briars,
> Set us to spin or sew, or at the best
> Make us wood-hewers, water-bearing wights:
> For sacred service let us take no rest
> Use us as Joshua did the Gibonites. (1.6.421-32)

Constabarus mixes signs of clothing and occupation, such as armour and sewing, together with qualities of natural substances such as fire burning down. He obliterates the distinction between naturally and culturally assigned attributes; Constabarus's world view allots equal importance to the fixedness of both forms. He depends on the systematic distinction of all things to define and maintain gender. Salome's attempt to take a male action is seen as a violation of the ordained code of nature as well as society.

Salome sees it as only defying society, however. The rationale which prompts her to take such action scrutinizes the acceptance of inequality between men and women:

> Why should such privilege to man be given?
> Or given them, why barr'd from women then?
> Are men than we in greater grace with Heaven?
> Or cannot women hate as well as men? (1.4.305-308).

She would seem to imply that the answers to her two final rhetorical questions is 'no', allowing her the justification in breaking the law. She perceives herself as a "custom-breaker" (309) and plans to show her sex "the way to freedom's door" (309). Salome believes she is transgressing only those divisions distinguished by culture and supports herself with the implied equality of women's grace with Heaven and ability to hate.

Salome does not continue with her plan to divorce her husband, but she still illustrates very clearly what path to "freedom's door" can be taken in ancient Judea. With the unexpected return of her brother, she adopts a more certain and effective manner of securing her separation from Constabarus: his death at the hands of the king. Travitsky has observed in *The Femme Covert* that "women are effective in this world only if they can influence male decision-makers, a tenuous and insecure type of dependence" (188). To Salome, however, this indirect manipulation is the more secure of her two plans. Although Constabarus has seemingly accepted Salome's divorce, or else retaliated by divorcing her (for the first son of Babas refers to her in the past tense as having been Constabarus' wife [2.2.93]), she still seeks his death to secure her marriage to Silleus. While supposedly in a position of restricted freedom, Salome is actually empowered to enact her will surreptitiously when under the patriarchal control of the king. Instead of suppressing Salome's power, the hierarchical model of nature and authority which Constabarus invokes strengthens it. The comparative amount of power Salome possesses in the king's absence and in his presence depicts

an image no doubt frightening to the pamphleteers who wish to maintain the authority of the male over the female. With the return of her brother Salome does lose overt freedom, now having "no room to walk at large" (3.2.117). She gains, instead, the indirect freedom of being able to enact her will.

Salome discards the direct method of divorce in favour of indirect scheming. Salome's actions directly accuse the hierarchical model of authority as being the cause of women's transgressions of the traditional feminine virtues. Women, who are unable to deal directly by being barred from the power and privilege which Salome notes men have, are forced to resort to indirect cunning and manipulation of those in power to gain their will. And while women are perhaps supposed to suppress their will as a part of the naturally ordained system, the inability of all the women of the play (with the possible exception of Graphina) to do so challenges, if not the legitimacy of this expectation, the reality of it. The actions of Salome indicate that, by denying women power in order to gain their obedience and maintain their virtue, the reverse is created; men fall victim to the indirect powers of women who have resorted to vice in the absence of personal power. The contrast between a woman's direct and indirect power can clearly be seen in the mirrored plights of Salome and her brother Pheroras. In the absence of Herod, Pheroras gains authority and is able to enact his own will in marrying his servant Graphina. With the return of Herod he fears losing his power and his new bride. Salome has only uncertain means of securing her will in divorcing her husband in Herod's absence; with his return she guarantees the enactment of her will. The opposing nature of their relations to authority are effectively and succinctly

illustrated in the stychomythic interchange between Salome and Pheroras when they first learn of Herod's return:

> *Salome*: I shall enjoy the comfort of my life.
> *Pheroras*: And I shall lose it, losing of my wife
> *Salome*: Joy, heart, for Constabarus shall be slain
> *Pheroras*: Grieve, soul, Graphina shall from me be ta'en.
> *Salome*: Smile, cheeks, the fair Silleus shall be mine
> *Pheroras*: Weep, eyes, for I must with a child combine. (3.2.55-60).

Pheroras is unable to defend his action, but Salome, who as a woman should supposedly have less power, promises to "win the king's consent" for her brother.

The play offers other comparisons as well of men's direct actions and women's indirect actions to achieve similar ends. Salome's attempt to divorce her husband cannot but be viewed in light of the often repeated fact that her brother Herod divorced his wife out of desire for Mariam. In both Doris's appearances in the play, she makes reference to the inconstant desire of Herod that caused her to be replaced by Mariam. The comparison of the two divorces clearly focuses the source of criticism for Salome's action on not the act itself, but her usurpation of the male role in attempting such action. Whereas Herod could act directly in accordance with the law, Salome's only option to achieve the same is to act indirectly, transgressing gender roles and violating feminine virtue. Likewise, Silleus, seeking to avenge Constabarus's insults against Salome, challenges him directly in a duel while Salome, seeking to avenge Mariam's insults, uses underhanded treachery to provoke Mariam's execution by the order of Herod. In both circumstances, the woman's method is more effective: Herod's ex-wife, Doris, is able to return with her son to the city to attempt to retaliate

against Herod and regain the throne for her son, whereas Constabarus's execution ensures that he will never interfere with Salome's plans again. Silleus has no more success in defending Salome's name than he does in defeating her detractor in the duel; his challenge prompts Constabarus's further invective against Salome and the duel ends with Silleus's surrender of his life to the mercy of the more-skilled Constabarus. By contrast, Salome successfully engineers the execution of Mariam and remains unpunished for her actions. It is interesting to observe that from the start of the play Silleus has turned over to Salome the responsibility for devising their marriage: "Hath thy innated wisdom found the way / To make Silleus deem deified, / By gaining thee" (1.5.326), as though aware of the greater effectiveness of Salome's vice to direct action.

Possibly the writers of the pamphlets were aware of the greater power of women's indirect dealings as well. They certainly reveal their fear of such a possibility. But by insisting on the divine order of the authorial paradigm, they overlook the reality which Cary's play reveals: feminine vice is encouraged by a system which attempts to deny a woman's will. Here we can see, then, hierarchy's effect of enhancing the wickedness of women's use of manipulation. Omitting any reference in the play to Cleopatra's beneficent use of influence leaves a portrait of women whose only access to power is indirect and whose only use of that power is for malice or personal gain. Cary's adaptations to the story make the criticism of society much more potent.

CHAPTER THREE

THE MEDIUM: SPEECH

"...woman's poor revenge, / which dwells but in the tongue!"
- John Webster, *The White Devil*

One of the voices raised in opposition to the Renaissance's conflation of silence with chastity and obedience is that of John Davies. Davies dedicates the epistle of his *Muse's Sacrifice* to three contemporary women writers. In this dedication he breaks the conventional image of feminine virtue by simultaneously praising the literary talents of these women, whom he calls "...the Muses Darlings, ... / Shapers, and Soules of all Soule-charming Rimes!", and their superior virtue which makes them "the Glory of these Times"(19-20). One of these women was Elizabeth Cary[1]. This dedication, published prior to the publication but after the composition of *The Tragedy of Mariam*, explicitly acknowledges the play with a reference to "scenes of . . . Palestine". In it Davies entreats Cary, along with the two other women writers, to publish their works. With the popularity of public printing, the early modern proscription against women's speech encompassed more avenues than would have been considered in the ancient Judean setting of Cary's drama. Publication, which Davies urges, clearly transgresses

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[1] The other two women to whom the work is dedicated are Lucy, Countesse of Bedford and Mary, Countess-Dowager of Pembroke.

this proscription as a form of 'public language'. Throughout the rest of the epistle Davies is inordinately concerned with the detrimental effect of public speech on virtue. Why, then, would he urge *women* - who are traditionally bound to silence as a requisite of virtue - to engage in this sphere of public speech? The evident rationale for this unconventional petition provides relevant insight into the concerns over public speech expressed in Cary's own play, *The Tragedy of Mariam*, especially the role public speech plays in the debate over the woman question.

Davies offers two reasons for the women to publish. The first he explains in no more than a four-line stanza - posterity will not record that women ever had such talent:

> 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. (77-80)

The second reason occupies much more of the poem. For twenty stanzas Davies acrimoniously complains of the current state of the press which is filled only with unintelligent foolishness, the "Disease of Times, of Mindes, Men, Arts and Fame, / vaine self-conceit" (117-18). His outrage arises from the moral influence of these works, the fear that their "false-light" (96) will lead people "awry" (97) or "to Darknesse" (98). In opposition to this moral degeneration, the women writers "presse

the Presse with little [they] have made"(160)[2]; Davies implies that with the correction of this omission, the morality of the press - and its readers - may be corrected as well.

An interesting understanding of language is apparent underneath Davies's reasoning. In the first of Davies's reasons, language is invested with the power to create perceptions equated almost with truth; in the second, with the power to corrupt or reform morality. Davies is not alone in this view of language's power. The pamphlets of the woman question debate are founded on this same understanding, sometimes explicitly, sometimes implicitly. Both the attack and defense pamphlets frequently justify their presumption into public language by claiming their ability to reform or check the corruption of morality. The defences written by women are also heavily concerned with perceptions of truth which public language can create: most specifically, in the forum of a gender debate, the perceptions of *woman* which they create. The implications of these powers become immensely complicated when , as in the early modern England of Elizabeth Cary or the ancient Judea of her play, the powers of public language are overtly forbidden to women.

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[2] Margaret Ferguson in "Running On with Almost Public Voice" observes how the sexual insinuation of the term "presse the Presse," along with the image of the press as a vulnerable attacked woman in the following stanza, invests the petition with an ambiguous endorsement of publication: "The advice to publish is tied to a covert argument for remaining aloof from a scene of illicit sexual traffic"(45). It is interesting to note, however, that "presse the Press" is not an original coinage of Davies. It is used in an identical form by Thomas Nash in *Anatomie of Absurditie*, and I wonder if it is not simply another occurrence of a popular verbal pun which also includes the "oppressing the press" variation used by Sowrenam.

The Tragedy of Mariam enters the debate on these points. Through the use of dramatization Cary's play reinforces the extreme power of language attested to by Davies and the writers of the debate. The plot of *Mariam* explores the complications which arise from this power being denied women under the justification of virtue. The issue of the virtuousness of female speech frames the entirety of *The Tragedy of Mariam*. It also frames much of the recent criticism on the play. While critics have been divided on what the ultimate stance of the play (or playwright) is on the issue of women's speech, it is generally observed that the play submits the issue to a rigorous debate of conflicting ideals. Elaine Beilin sees in this debate the enacted personal psychomachia of the author attempting to deal with the dilemma in her own life ("Elizabeth Cary"53); Nancy Gutierrez sees a resignation of the issue to the audience ("Valuing *Mariam*" 246). Margaret Ferguson, in "Running On with Almost Public Voice" notes that "a woman's right to assume a 'public' voice is both central to the drama and unanswered within it" (38). Ferguson's belief that this question is unanswered arises from her observations of the contradictory statements within the play. No doubt she is correct in surmising that the contradictions within the play, especially as regards this issue, have led to the lack of consensus amongst the readers of the play. It is precisely these internal contradictions, however, that point to the fact that the play is less concerned with determining "a woman's right to assume a public voice" as it is with exploring the implications of a society attempting to prohibit that

right. The question which Ferguson poses is struggled with by the writers of the debate. *The Tragedy of Mariam* steps outside this question and, confirming the understanding of language's power underlying the debate, examines instead the societal influence of the debate's running commentary on woman - including her "right to assume a public voice".

Inextricably twined with the various facets of the woman question debate is a considerable preoccupation with the issue of speech and the power of speech to influence behaviour[3]. Speech is a concern in the debate not only within the discussion of suitable behaviour but also as the forum in which the debate takes place. The persuasiveness, validity and sincerity of the arguments cannot be appraised divided from the medium of its delivery. The overlap frequently results in a self-reflexive concern over the suitability of the contributing works. As a result, all opinions expressed on speech within the debate, whether in praise or criticism of women's voices, are heavily coloured by their medium. A writer condemning women's talkativeness and incessant complaining would have to employ some form of strategy to prevent his insults from returning on his own written words; a writer criticising the inept writing skill of another would have to be extremely careful not to commit the same mistakes. The writers concern themselves, extensively, as Davies did in the

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[3] In early modern England, especially with the growing accessibility to the press, the questions regarding speech extended from verbal language to include, if not be dominated by, written language; it is in this sense of verbal and written communication that I use the term, here.

dedicatory epistle, with disparaging the writings of others - with questioning their right to assume a public voice.

By the standards of Renaissance morality, women were at a disadvantage in their attempts to even engage this question. By conventional ideology, the question was answered for women exclusively on the criterion of gender. For the women who attempted to publicly present their own defence in the formal controversy, the feminine virtue of silence presented a most problematic premise to contest. Since the women writers of early modern England generally tended to work within the prescribed images of virtue, a woman could not even enter the speech debate in her own defence without simultaneously violating the image of virtue. Near the end of the seventeenth century, Anne Finch succinctly expressed the serious infringement that speech offered to the overall image of a woman's virtue, in her poem "The Introduction":

> Alas! a woman that attempts the pen,
> Such an intruder on the rights of men,
> Such a presumptuous Creature, is esteem'd,
> The fault, can by no vertue be redeem'd" (9-12).

The debate attackers make deliberate use of this constraint to simultaneously discourage and discredit any protests put forward by the victims of their attacks, women. In addition to the plentiful condemnations of women's violation of silence as one of their primary vices, these authors also specifically address the inappropriateness of women responding to the accusations. The three attacking pamphlets that I am here examining, *The Scole house, Anatomie of Absurditie,* and *The Arraignment,* all

dismiss women's verbal objections with mocking images anticipating any protests as shrewish and ineffective: Thomas Nash in *The Anatomie* dismissively predicts women's attempts to stop his mouth by drowning him out with "most voices" (A2), *The Arraignment* likens refuting women to stinging hornets (A3^{v}), and *The Scole house* attributes women's verbal rejection of criticism to their being "lyght of eare ... and so sowre" that they only ever note criticism and never praise (A2). *The Scole house* and *The Arraignment* twist these protests into a two-fold proof of guilt: first by declaring that only those who are guilty will be outraged and second by declaring verbal outrage as a demonstration of vice. *The Scole house* dismisses criticism in precisely this fashion at the outset of the argument:

> Perchaunce the women, take displeasure
> Bycause I rubbe them, on the gall
> To them that good be, paradventure
> It shall not be materyall
> The other sorte, no force at all
> Say what they wyll, or bendeth the brewe
> Them selfe shall prove, my saynge trewe. (A^{v})

The Arraignment uses this same metaphor of the galled horse and warns women to be silent: "...whatsoever you thinke privately I wish you to conceale it with silence, least in starting up to finde fault you prove your selves guilty of these monstrous accusations..." (A2^{v}).

These attempts to discredit women's opposition did not succeed in silencing the women writers Anger, Speght, Sowrenam and Munda. For all these women it was necessary, however, to first defeat the logic silencing their own defences in order to present their arguments. In addition to denying the opposition's presentation of

woman's voice as the tool of scolds and flattering wantons, the women writers rewrote the image of writing woman to justify their assumption of public voice.

Jane Anger shifts the focus away from women's silence or speech towards the motivation of men's continuing attacks in the absence of self-defense or counter-attack by women. Overlooking the numerous proxy-defences by men, Anger conjures an image of dishonourable men unfairly attacking weaker opponents, the lack of opposition succeeding only in bolstering their insolence: "doubtles the weaknesse of our wits, and our honest bashfulnesse, by reason whereof they suppose that there is not one amongst us who can, or dare reprove their slanders and false reproaches" (B). Founding her argument on the image of women as weak, defenceless and innocent, Anger excuses her own "presumption" (A4) in writing - stretching "the listes of her modestie" (A4^{v}) - by declaring the injustice of unchallenged abuse. Rachel Speght ruptures the constraint of silence declared by Swetnam by exposing its illogic:

> ...though everie galled horse, being touched, doth kicke; yet every one that kickes is not galled: so that you might as well have said, therefore none feare fire but those that are burnt, as made that illiterate conclusion which you have absurdly inferred. (B2^{v}-B3)

Perhaps leaving the defeat of Swetnam's logic to Speght's earlier defence, Ester Sowrenam instead rewrites the image of the responding woman to distinguish between a railing scold and an honest accuser, defining herself as the latter: "... the first rageth upon passionate furie, without bringing cause or proof; the other bringeth direct proofe for what she alleageth. . . . I shew just and direct proofe for what I say" (47).

Constantia Munda also examines the silencing attempted by Swetnam. In a lengthy passage she describes the attempts of attackers to silence women's defense, but twists the image of the silenced woman into an image of proud victory:

> You'l put gagges in our mouthes, and conjure us all to silence: you will first abuse us, then binde us to the peace, wee must be tongue-tied, lest in starting up to finde fault, wee prove our selves guiltie of those horrible accusations. The sinceritie of our lives, and quietnesse of conscience, is a wall of brasse to beat backe the bullets of your vituperious scandals in your owne face. ($C4^{v}$)

Munda invokes an image of the inequitable nature of men's attacks against women similar to Anger's . Also ignoring the many defences written by men, Munda hypothesizes that Swetnam aimed his invective at women assuming that his victims would be unable to counter-attack:

> wherefore you surmized, that inveighing against poore illiterate women, we might fret and bite the lip at you, wee might repine to see ourselves baited and tost in a blanket, but never durst in open view either disclose your blasphemous and derogative slanders, or maintaine the untainted puritie of our glorious sex (14).

All four of these women writers refute the silencing by undermining their opponents' credibility, a strategy which the women used throughout their tracts: they gain power for their own words by demonstrating the flaws in the words, not just the beliefs, of the opponent. Frequently, the authors seem more concerned with criticising the logic and writing style of their opponents' arguments than with defending the reputation of women against the attacks. Anger begins her essay with a condemnation of the inaccuracies of men's writing, complaining that they "run so into Rethorick, as often times they overrun the boundes of their own wits" (B). Anger is

responding to attacking pamphlets in general and to a specific pamphlet in particular[4] when she identifies the fundamental flaw of the authors' arguments as being that "their mindes are so carried away with the manner, as no care at all is had of the matter" (B). To correct this imbalance, Anger focuses heavily on correcting the 'matter', the examples and facts of the argument. In particular she warns against the distortion and deception of men's "smooth speeches" (C3)[5], a warning which re-emphasises her initial accusation of rhetorical deception in the pamphlet to which she is responding. The three women who respond to *The Arraignment* also criticize the author's argument through literary concerns. They take the opposite approach, however, focusing heavily on the 'manner' to dispute Swetnam's argument. In contrast to the "pithie" sentences, "pure" words and "pleasing" style of Anger's provoker (B^{v}), Swetnam is unanimously criticised as inept and illiterate. Speght describes the pamphlet as "altogether without methode, irregular, without Grammaticall Concordance, and a promiscuous mingle mangle" (F), Sowrenam accuses Swetnam of "clamorous words" with no proof (47), and Munda spends the bulk of her breath in violent attack against the "hotch-potch" product of his "barren-idle-donghill braine" (A3). All the authors point out the flaws

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[4]The specific work to which Anger refers and responds in her *Protection* is unknown. Woodbridge as well as Henderson and McManus favour Helen Andrews Kahin's suggestion that the unknown work is a now lost pamphlet listed in the Stationers' Register as *Boke his Surfeyt Love* in 1588.

[5]Anger's descriptions of men's "lying lips and deceitful tongues"(C) and insistence that "their faire wordes [are] allurements to destruction" (C4) reflect the familiar condemnations of woman's speech back onto the accusers. This same tactic recurs in the works of the other women writers.

and mistakes in Swetnam's writing as a significant part of refuting his arguments. Speght even attaches to the end of her defense an entire section entitled "Certaine Quaeres to the bayter of Women, with confutation of some part of his Diabolicall Discipline" dedicated to illustrating the improper logic and writing of *The Arraignment*.

Pointing out the flaws in the logic and writing style of the attackers bolstered the women writers' claims of their right to public voice in more than one way: it allowed them to overcome the confining restriction of silence expressed by their opponents; it challenged the credibility of the opponents; and of radical importance to this debate, it pointedly demonstrated women's abilities in reasoning, learning and speech in defiance of the critical portrait so often depicted in misogynist attacks. In contrast to the tactics used by women, the male-authored *Mulerium Pean*, although written in the form of a woman's response (the dictation of Venus), makes no attacks on the literary abilities of its opponent. The *Pean* refutes *The Scole house* only with an opposing list of the virtues and virtuous examples of women, completely ignoring the condemnation of women's speech as evidence of guilt and vice. The female contributors to the debate are much more concerned with the role of words and public speech as not merely the medium of but also an intrinsic component of the premises of the debate.

Linda Woodbridge sees the women's excessive preoccupation with the writing itself as evidence that the objections are "primarily literary" (88), and that the women writers were at least equally concerned with the rhetorical game of the formal

controversy as they were with the actual defence of real women and criticism of misogynist attitudes. Woodbridge maintains that "the formal controversy did not often deal in real issues: it was mainly a game" (91). Based on the attitudes expressed in the pamphlets about literary concerns, this would seem to be an overly divisive distinction between "real issues" and "literary" concerns. I would maintain that the literary elements were recognized as being of significant importance to the women's defences. Literary concerns *are* real issues to the writers of the controversy.

Both sides of the woman question debate accept as axiomatic the power of the word. They cite that power to criticize their opponents as well as to legitimize, not just the right, but the necessity of their own public speech. The image of women using language to deceive or overpower men is countered by the female defendants with a reciprocal image of men. On the basis that through the power of his words he may increase virtue and "lay vyce"(A^v), Gosynhill justifies his criticism of women which is excessively concerned with the evils of women's speech. Swetnam makes a similar claim and also defends his words as a just response to the evil actions of women for "wronged men will not be tongue-tyed" (A2). Nash outlines his attack in the reverse manner, admonishing the inaccuracies of written praises of women as proof of the general idiocy of most published authors. The power of words, regardless of their validity, is expressed in *Mulerium Pean* by the women who appear to the author exclaiming the effect of a published attack, "All women wherby be sore revyled" (A2). In amends, the women demand a publication outlining their virtues. Speght likewise affirms the power of speech. Claiming that "scandals and defamations of the

malevolent in time prove pernitious" (A3), she uses her own words to "nip" the damage "in the head" that Swetnam's work poses (A3). Sowrenam emphasizes the seriousness of blasphemy and Munda describes the violence of false words with militaristic metaphors and the de-arming power of verbalized truth. These women writers express, in common with Thomas Nash, the view that improper use of language and improper morality are one and the same. They maintain a strong faith that proper writing can only yield truth and encourage virtue and improper can only yield falsehood and encourage vice. Munda in particular is concerned with the societally and individually damaging effects of the 'illiterate' pamphlets being abundantly produced. Her opening sentences conflate the two concerns when she complains of "The itching desire of oppressing the presse with many sottish and illiterate Libels, stuft with all manner of ribaldry, and sordid inventions..."(B2), and the base and idiotic writers who "limme out vice that it may seeme delicious and amiable; so to detract from vertue and honesty" ($B2^{v}$). Thomas Nash makes the same complaint towards the opposite end of criticising inadequate writers who with "ignoraunt zeale wyll presumptuously presse into the Presse" faulty opinions including the praises of women. Either approach reveals the similar acceptance of the power of word as a 'real issue' revealing and, most importantly, affecting morality.

The issues of morality and public voice are similarly tangled in *The Tragedy of Mariam*. The same assumptions regarding speech - its power to affect morality and the perception of truth - found on both sides of the woman debate also recur in Cary's drama. Accepting these premises, the women writers of the pamphlets scrutinized the

legitimacy and moral implications of denying this power to women. In "Running On with Almost Public Voice," Margaret Ferguson explores aspects of *Mariam* which similarly scrutinize the same question of "a woman's right to assume a 'public' voice". Ferguson's article conveniently draws together many of the observations of earlier critics about facets of the play that debate the connection between feminine virtue and speech. A recapitulation of some of these observations Ferguson addresses will illustrate a number of the ways in which *Mariam* engages the issue of women's public speech.

Ferguson observes how *Mariam* is structured to test the defining limits of public voice from its opening lines. The soliloquized question of the play's heroine, "How oft have I with publike voice run on? / To censure Rome's last Hero for deceit" (1.1.1-2)[6], immediately links the themes of female public voice with transgression and censure, emphasized through the punctuation which, as Ferguson explains, forces the reader to "run on" over the end of the line. This "pregnant" opening expands into what Ferguson terms "a Chinese box set of questions about the logic of the Pauline injunction against female speech" (48) in which the reader encounters within an ambiguously public form of speech (the closet drama) a written representation of a woman soliloquizing about past, possibly culpable, acts of public speech. This

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[6]The 1994 edition of *The Tragedy of Mariam* omits but makes note of the question mark at the end of the first line present in the 1613 text. I have retained the 1613 punctuation used by Ferguson for this quotation as it is significant to her observation.

representation poses questions about the delineation between public and private speech, especially regarding the shady territory of writing, drama and soliloquy.

The medium itself of Cary's drama therefore enters into this debate, and the Chorus's words in the third act criticising women who seek "to be by public language grac'd" (3.3.240) interrogate the play's very right to exist. Like the female-authored responses to the condemnation of woman's speech, the written medium cannot be divorced from the matter of the response; the transgressive act of publicly publishing a written work is itself a rebuttal to the injunction. This written context is a necessary consideration in regarding the words of the Chorus. As Ferguson explains, the dramatic context of the play renders acceptance of the Chorus's words problematic. First, Ferguson finds that the Chorus is inconsistent, offering contradictory views on the precise nature of Mariam's error and the nature of the virtue they advocate. The second stanza admonishes her inability to refrain from "lawful liberties"(226) but then transforms the error into the illegitimate and political "usurpation upon another's right" (239). Correspondingly, the characterization of the virtue which begins as distinct from physical chastity - since a woman may be chaste although she speaks privately to those other than her husband - changes to become synonymous with physical unchastity with the conclusion that "her mind if not peculiar is not chaste" (242). Second, the Chorus's suggestion that Mariam's death could have been prevented had she not spoken to any other than her husband is proven an inadequate prevention: "it is precisely because Mariam speaks her mind -not only to others but also, and above all, to her husband - that she loses her life" (52).

Ferguson views these aspects of the drama as part of the play's unanswered interrogation of women's public language. Observing the contradictory opinions within the play, she regards the play's ideological statement regarding the issue of woman's speech to be " mixed" and "contradictory," at times attacking and at times advocating the Renaissance's repressive concepts (38). The aspects which Ferguson explores definitely do show evidence of the play's mixed messages on women's speech. The important question to consider here, however, is the role of these aspects within the larger ideological statement of the play. An internal resolution of the traditional debate on women's public speech, pro or con, is not provided by Cary. Instead, the tragedy is the stage on which she explores the wider issue of the effect of the power of language, particularly when it is a power denied to women. To fully understand any statement which the play makes about Renaissance society's views on women and speech, those societal views themselves must enter into the interpretation. The varying opinions on woman's speech within the play must be viewed in relation to the varying opinions on woman's speech outside the play. In examining the issue of woman's speech, recent criticism on the play has tended to focus primarily on the Renaissance's concept of woman and expand into the concept of speech only as a secondary sub-consideration. An examination beginning with Renaissance views of speech provides new insight into the various views expressed within the play on the issue of woman's speech and ultimately into *Mariam's* ideological statement. Throughout the play, the attitude towards the power of language is the same as that expressed in the woman question debate as well as in Davies's epistle dedicated to Cary. Language is shown in

the play as possessing the ability to influence morality and to alter perceptions of reality.

The Tragedy of Mariam is exceedingly preoccupied with the power of words. The entire plot is driven through words. Actions occur as the manifestation of speech and are usually executed outside the frame of the play by minor or unseen characters. The completion of actions is merely reported. The plot itself is initiated by a rumour of Herod's death. The false words of this report prompt various responses from the drama's characters, responses which are primarily verbal in nature or of which only the verbal aspect is dramatised. Sohemus, who guards Mariam, discloses Herod's order for her death. Mariam deliberates her ambivalent reactions to the news of her husband's death in a soliloquy, linked with an examination of her own past speech actions. Mariam's mother, Alexandra, urges her daughter to discuss with her how to deal with the new circumstances. Pheroras declares to his beloved Graphina his intention to marry her - the enactment of which slips between the scenes. Salome, conversely, declares her revolutionary intention to divorce her husband, Constabarus - a divorce which would take place simply through verbal or written notice. Constabarus takes actual action in releasing the sons of Babas, whom he has secretly hidden against Herod's order for their death, but the scene presents only the conversation following their release. Doris returns to Jerusalem cursing the city and her fate in being displaced from the throne, but announcing her intention to be revenged and regain for her son his royal position. The Chorus enters to chastise the folly of acting on an unconfirmed rumour and foreshadows the revelation that the story was false and Herod

still lives. The impending conflicts of the play are set up by accepting as reality the words of public language: the same folly which Davies fears leads many to "Darkness".

The conflicts resulting from this folly eventually end in a series of very dark, tragic conclusions. The characters initially realize their mistake not through the actual return of Herod but once again through a verbal report. Ananell, the high priest, informs Salome and Pheroras of the news and Sohemus reports it to Mariam. The new message starts another round of verbally based action as the characters attempt to adjust themselves - and their recently committed actions - to the alteration of circumstance. Salome, the only character who views Herod's life as more personally beneficial than his death, dominates control over the subsequent scenes. The only tool she uses is speech - directly in implanting in Herod's mind slanderous notions of Mariam's unfaithfulness; indirectly in motivating Pheroras to speak against Constabarus and provoking Herod to execute Mariam. Herod issues orders for actions (he does not commit the acts himself), the deaths of Sohemus, Constabarus and the sons of Babas and Mariam, but it is clear that even his words are controlled through the scheming words of Salome. The executions take place "off-stage" and their completion is reported, with particular emphasis given to the description of Mariam's death. Mariam's execution, incited by the slander of Salome, poignantly affirms the triumph of word over deed. It also affirms the view of language evident within the debate. Whereas the pamphlets cite the power of speech to influence action, *The Tragedy of Mariam* unquestionably dramatizes that power.

The play is constantly drawing attention to the concepts of language and speech. Not only do the characters discuss issues of language and speech but they endlessly describe their thoughts and actions in the metaphoric imagery of words. Salome uses a literary metaphor to describe shame being "written on [her] tainted brow" (1.4.283). Alexandra uses imagery of writing to question Mariam's belief in Herod's love: "read'st thou love in Crimson characters?" (1.2.108). The butler, repenting his act of betraying Mariam, envisions "an angel notary. / That doth record it down in leaves of brass" (4.5.272). Herod's last words similarly envision the recording of his acts on his gravestone: "Which monument shall an inscription have, And these shall be the words it shall contain: *Here Herod lies, that hath his Mariam slain*" (5.1.256-8). Words are described in terms so concretized that they take the place of the object. Alexandra wishes her "curse to pursue [Herod's] breathless trunk and spirit" (1.2.83). Constabarus protests the sentiments of the sons of Babas by claiming that "with friends there is no such word as 'debt'" (2.1.100). He also reassures them by claiming that "If any word of mine your heart did grieve, / The word dissented from the speaker's will" (2.2.163). Silleus is warned by Constabarus of the transience of Salome's love with a metaphor that affirms power in the word itself: "As with a word thou dids't her love obtain, / So with a word she will from thee be won" (2.4.319). The anxiety over names extends from this concretized imagery. Constabarus tells Salome that she wrongs her "name" (1.6.375). Salome, in turn is angered over being given "so base a style / As 'foote' to the proud Mariam" (1.4.261). Herod accuses Mariam specifically with the use of a name: "with usurper's name, I

Mariam stain" (4.4.230). Constabarus protests the remorse of Babas's first son in the name of friendship, asking him: "still wilt thou wrong the sacred name of friend?" (4.6.287). Words and names become the substitute for people, actions, and concepts; the signs themselves are attributed with the characteristics of what they signify and are envisioned as imbued with the relevant power. Metaphoric images such as these recur profusely throughout the entire play, drawing attention to the drama's emphasis on words over deeds.

This preponderance of speech over action is typical of the genre of closet drama, and makes closet drama a suitable forum for a story in which words not only dominate but also control action. Also typical of the genre, Nancy Guiterrez argues, is its use in exploring and criticising political ideas. The two concerns combined - the power of language and ideological criticism - comprise one of *Mariam*'s central themes: a criticism of society's image of woman which is both established and perpetuated through public language. Rather than directly querying the question of "a woman's right to assume a public voice" as does the woman question debate, *The Tragedy of Mariam* examines the effects of publicly pronouncing the opinions and idealogies which form the debate. *Mariam* does not offer unified criticism or approbation of woman's speech. Although many critics have attempted to decide which side of the woman's speech issue the play advocates, that is not the issue that the play directly examines. The play does, however, offer severe criticism of the underlying ideologies that proscribe woman's speech and of the written attacks attempting to correct the transgression of the virtue of silence; the play examines the

examination of woman's speech. *The Tragedy of Mariam* establishes criticism of this examination in two primary ways: first, through presenting women's use of false speech as their only alternative, barred as they are from public language and direct action and, second, through the harm caused by the characters' belief in the unsubstantiated words of attacks supposedly intended to improve a woman's virtue.

Despite the sanctions against women's speech expressed in the play, the primary exploitation of this power is performed by women. In like fashion to the manner in which the female characters turn to subversive and unvirtuous action under the restrictions of obedience, they turn to subversive use of speech under the charge of silence. The ironic result that Cary's play dramatizes is that the restrictions on women's direct power actually incite women to use the more powerful, if indirect, tool of false speech. Swetnam, in his vituperations, accurately hits on this basis for women's conniving use of speech:

> Divers beasts and fowle by nature have more strength in one part of the body then in another . . . but a womans chiefe strength is in her tongue, the Serpent hath not so much venome in his taile as she hath in her tongue. (F4^{v} - G)[7]

Salome's use of speech to control the actions of others confirms (or amplifies) not only the worst of the portraits of women's vice in the attack pamphlets, but also the vision

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[7]Swetnam's use of animal exempla in this passage, "...as the Eagle in the beake, the Unicorn in the horne, the Bull in the head...," implies women's limitations of strength are a characteristic of nature rather than individual choice. Although this would somewhat undermine his justification to motivate women to proper behaviour, he seems unconcerned about denying women the only strength he says that nature has given them.

of false words creating vice which is so predominantly alluded to by the women's defence pamphlets. Comparing Swetnam's work to putrefied water, Speght declares that the product of his "idle, corrupt braine" cannot cause good "for it produceth no other creatures but those that are venomous or noisome, as snakes, adders, and such like" (B^{v}). Speght's pamphlet seems to identify the venemous creatures as the unspecified "pernitious" products of "the scandals and defamations of the malevolent" (A3); Cary's play reattributes these characteristics to women's vengeful speech. Constabarus warns Silleus against Salome's speech: "Her mouth, though serpent-like it never hisses, / Yet like a serpent, poisons where it kisses" (2.4.334). Doris speaks of cursing Mariam with "ten thousand tongues, and ev'ry tongue / Inflam'd with poison's power, and steep'd in gall" (4.8.609-10). The imagery of poisonous speech echoes the only physical act undertaken (even then, indirectly) by a woman in the play: Salome's framing of Mariam through the use of a cup of suspected poison. In the scene where, under Salome's direction, the butler attributes the origin of the cup to Mariam, Salome succeeds in symbolically transferring, along with responsibility for the poison, the vices of physical and verbal deceit from herself to Mariam in Herod's mind. The use of poison is appropriate to her character which throughout the play takes on a Machiavellian cast through the unscrupulous use of deceit for personal gain. Clarence

Boyer notes in *The Villain as Hero in Elizabethan Tragedy* that poison became "the prime factor in Elizabethan Machiavellianism" (37).[8]

Whereas the image of poisonous speech reflects Salome's effective Machiavellian schemes, the same image associated with Doris emphasizes her ineffective attempts at revenge. Before Salome's plot to enact revenge through the use of poison, similar plots are mentioned when Doris and her son, Antipater, return to the city. Doris rejects Antipater's suggestion that "Mariam's children might subverted be, / By poison's drink" (2.3.274-75), judging their own strength to be currently insufficient to succeed. So although Doris wishes vengeance to kill "high-hearted Mariam" (253), she does not enact it as Salome does. Likewise she is ineffective in her use of speech, viewing curses as impotent to answer her wrongs (4.8.611). Doris's curses to Mariam shortly before her execution, while distressing to Mariam, are unproductive in all respects excepting to foreshadow the death of Mariam's sons to Doris's - a death brought about by Antipater through the means which his mother rejects and, interestingly, employing Salome.[9] Doris rejects while Salome uses as her tools the

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[8] The principal crimes of the Elizabethan villain which Clarence Boyer notes arose from growing Machiavellianism in England - poison, murder, fraud and violence" (37) - appropriately suit Salome, as does Boyer's description of the Elizabethan image of Machiavelli : "guileful wickedness prevailing over innocent simplicity" (10).

[9] Weller and Ferguson append the explanation that: "A series of slanders, instigated by Antipater...enraged Herod against Alexander and Aristobulus, his sons by Mariam. Pheroras and Salome were willing instruments in this campaign; among other things, Salome made damaging use of domestic secrets extracted from her daughter, who was married to Aristobulus" (172-73).

two associated strengths attributed to women by Swetnam in the passage cited above: speech and poison.

Just as the denial of direct action to women results in their employing more destructive, indirect, and yet more effective methods, the denial of public language to women results in their employing more destructive, and yet effective, subversive language. Salome is motivated to effect the downfall of Mariam in revenge for Mariam's condescending insults. A similar tension is developed in the play between Salome's lover Silleus and her first husband, Constabarus. In order to likewise avenge the insults against Salome's name, Silleus challenges Constabarus to a sword fight - the only scene of action in the play. The 'on-stage' action of this scene significantly contrasts with the method implemented by Salome. Silleus calls Constabarus to answer directly; Salome brings about Mariam's death surreptitiously. Silleus faces Constabarus; Salome is not even present when the cup of poison is brought to Herod, and her accusations are made in the absence of Mariam. The conflict between Silleus and Constabarus is resolved within the time span of the scene, ends in friendship and has no further negative repercussions; the conflict between Salome and Mariam involves the span of the entire play, ends in Mariam's execution and causes the deaths of Sohemus and the butler. But the direct approach of Silleus is denied Salome. Constabarus has already mocked her with the (presumably) rhetorical question "Why do you not as well our battles fight,/ And wear our armour?" (422-23) when she attempts direct instigation of a divorce.

In *Mariam*, the "venemous or noisome" creatures that Speght fears may grow from the words of the attacks against women are revealed to be women themselves, as they respond to the constraints underlying the words of those such as Swetnam. *Mariam* also dramatizes a second manner in which words prove pernicious, possibly the manner which Speght had in mind as justification for composing her pamphlet. At the end of act two the Chorus makes an exclamation, similar to that of Davies, about the moral dangers of believing false words. The Chorus's pronouncements are worth quoting at length here:

> To hear a tale with ears prejudicate,
> It spoils the judgement, and corrupts the sense;
> That human error, given to every state,
> Is greater enemy to innocence.
> It makes us foolish, heady, rash, unjust,
> It makes us never try before we trust.
>
> It will confound the meaning, change the words,
> For it our sense of hearing much deceives:
> Besides, no time to judgement it affords,
> To weigh the circumstance our ear receives.
> The ground of accidents it never tries,
> But makes us take for truth ten thousand lies.
>
> Our ears and hearts are apt to hold for good
> That we ourselves do most desire to be:
> And then we drown objections in the flood
> Of partiality, 'tis that we see
> That makes false rumours long with credit pass'd,
> Though they like rumours must conclude at last. (2.4.401-24)

The Chorus directs these heavy-handed words at the play's characters for having foolishly believed the false rumour of Herod's death. Little critical attention has been given to the role of these choric stanzas outside of their foreshadowing the king's

arrival and the disruption of the other characters' plans. Yet the wisdom of the words echo throughout the play where the Chorus never re-applies them. Herod, above any other character, is the most guilty of "hear[ing] a tale with ears prejudicate," even though these words are applied to all but him. It is precisely because Herod takes "for truth ten thousand lies" that Mariam is innocently executed. "Foolish, heady, rash, unjust" accurately describes Herod in the final scenes where he gullibly believes Salome's slander of Mariam.

The Chorus provides insight as to why Herod is so susceptible to Salome's suggestions. It is not simply a matter of folly, but of believing "That we ourselves do most desire to be." In other words, the belief is already planted in the mind; the false rumours are accepted because they match the preconceived idea. It does not take much of a suggestion for Herod to believe Mariam's infidelity. He is presented with a drink which is suspected, although never tested, to be poison. Instantly, Herod launches into a tirade against Mariam which repeats the same criticisms levelled against women elsewhere in the play. He expounds on the false deceptions of Mariam by calling her a "painted devil" (4.4.175) and "foul pith contained in the fairest rind" (4.4.189) and with the accusation that "a beateous body hides a loathsome soul" (4.4.178) and that "Hell itself lies hid/ beneath [her] heavenly show" (4.4.203-4) His words ring familiar to us as variations on those of Constabarus who calls Salome "a painted sepulchre" (2.4.325) and claims that women wear "angels' outward show, / But none are inly beautified" (4.6.322-2). In fact, the entire play is filled with accusations

against women that echo precisely the sentiments Herod spontaneously proclaims. The numerous repetitions of the same images and the same criticisms clearly indicate the societal source for not only Herod's words but also his suspicions against Mariam. Herod's words reflect a startling affinity with the accusations comprising the pamphlets attacking women. The similarity of image alludes outward from the play to the Renaissance woman question debate.

It is here that I see the allusions to the formal controversy employed in their most condemning manner. Mariam is executed not as a result of her own direct flaws, or even Salome's direct lies, but as a result of the pre-established belief that has infiltrated Herod's mind that women are deceitful and unfaithful. Herod falls for the trap which Simone de Beauvoir observes in *The Second Sex*: "The myth is one of those snares of false objectivity into which the man who depends on ready-made valuations rushes headlong" (261). Mariam's ultimate accuser is the accepted, underlying societal myth of women's vices; a myth perpetuated, as the allusions to the attacks on women make clear, by criticisms such as those publicly voiced in the woman question debate.

In this aspect of the play, we can see most powerfully the ability of public language to alter perceptions of reality and the effect of those perceptions on the image of woman. Despite the claims of the attack pamphlets that they are promoting virtue in women, *The Tragedy of Mariam* demonstrates that such public language and the willingness to deem it credible are in fact the "enemy to innocence." Rather than

merely participating in the debate over "a woman's right to assume a 'public' voice", Cary's play examines the deeper issues and implications of the question of public voice, offering an original and powerful insight into the question of the debate and the debate itself.

CONCLUSION: JUDGEMENT

Goe where thou wilt, still will I follow thee,
And with my sad laments still beat thy eares,
Till all the world of thy injustice heares.
-Aurelia in *Swetnam the Woman Hater*

Working from her source in Josephus's *Jewish Antiquities*, Cary makes an alteration which I find particularly intriguing: she omits Mariam's trial. Josephus recounts the specific detail that Herod orders the immediate execution of Soēmus, "while to his wife he conceded the right to a trial" (109). The trial which Herod allows her is appallingly unjust, however:

> Calling together those who were closest to him, he brought an elaborately framed accusation against her concerning the love-potions and drugs which she was alleged to have prepared. Since he was intemperate in speech and too angry to judge (calmly), those who were present realized in what state he was, and finally condemned her to death (109-11).

This scene of enacted injustice in *Antiquities* is replaced by silence and absence in *Mariam*. There is no trial; Mariam receives no voice. She is absent from the only discussion deciding her fate. In place of a trial, Herod and Salome debate the possibility of Mariam's execution (4.7). Instead of the opposing views of the judicial prosecution and defence, Mariam receives only the vacillations of Herod's emotions and the shiftings of Salome's manipulation. At the crucial moment of Herod's passionate accusations, Mariam barely utters a word in her own defence. The only defence she makes is to reject speech; she answers Herod's interrogation by denying

words: "Mariam says not so" (4.4.194). She faces her death with the silence she was unable to maintain previously, making no answer when her mother rebukes her and dying seemingly content, "after she some silent prayer had said" (5.1.84). Mariam is not only silent but is herself absent from the presentation of her own death - a presentation which is not visually depicted but verbally related.

This silence and absence is a significant aspect of the play. In "Struggling into Discourse", Gary Waller comments on the importance of recent feminist criticism "which focuses less on what is seemingly 'there' in a text than what is *not* there: not so much on what women's writings 'say' so much as what they did not or could not say, and why" (239). What is not there (a trial) and what is not said (Mariam's own defence) mark the tragedy of Mariam's death. However, I would here like to extend the significance of the "gaps" and "silences" which Waller mentions to the actions of the play itself. The trial is not simply missing from the play; its absence *is* there in the text, it *is* what the writer says, not what she could not.

This absence is all the more fascinating considering the play's close links to the woman question debate. *Mariam* engages with the same issues - virtue, authority and voice - central to the woman question debate. But Cary's play goes further than to simply invoke the same issues or deal with them in the same manner as was being done in the debate. By engaging in the debate from without - from a different genre - Cary is able to avoid the limitations endlessly repeated thoughout the debate. Instead, *Mariam* adds more - the fuller dimension of a societal context - to provide insight and commentary to the traditional arguments. *Mariam* dramatizes what the debate

discusses. *Mariam* also dramatizes the debate itself. Through recurrent allusions to the words, imagery and ideas directly repeated from the debate, the play re-creates and contains much of the debate within itself. It is this contained re-creation which provides Cary's play with the power of its criticism against society and against the very woman question debate.

But of all the links, repetition and allusions, one image is strikingly absent from Mariam: the image of the trial. Linda Woodbridge examines how the structure of the debate tracts was modeled upon "*judicial* oration" (38), and how the imagery of trial and judgement persisted through many of its individual works. Joseph Swetnam entitles his pamphlet an "Arraignment" of women. It is responded to by Sowrenam who depicts the arraignment of Swetnam and eventually a drama based upon the same idea, *Swetnam the Woman-hater Arraigned by Women*. Woodbridge notes that over the entire controversy hovers the image of woman as accused and defendant (38).

In this absence can be seen the ultimate judgement which Cary's play makes on the woman question debate. The links and allusions between this work and those of the debate associate Mariam with the figure of woman arraigned and judged within the debate, and her detractors with the attacking writers. The associations shift the perspective outward from the story presented in the play to the parallel situation existing in Jacobean society. The forces depicted in Mariam's unjust downfall are parallel presentations of the forces in Cary's society which arraign women. Woman, as the target of the debate, like Mariam receives no trial. The evidence against both is male-constructed image, false perception of virtue and the perpetuations of slander.

Subordination to male authority maintains Mariam and woman in the position of the accused. For the women of Jacobean society, like Mariam, silence is the only defence as well as the sentence. Mariam loses her breath (5.1.73) and women are told to bite their lips (Swetnam A4). There is no trial, only tyranny.

Cary's play illustrates the absence of a woman centred defence in the debate. Yet, the very existence of her play establishes that reciprocal side. The strength of Cary's rebuttal to the woman question debate is that it inverts the positions of accuser and defendant. Unlike the women defense writers who, working within the confines of the debate genre, primarily accepted the position of accused defendant, *Mariam* reverses the direction of accusation. Cary's play puts the woman debate itself on trial and dramatizes its crimes against women and against virtue. At the moment of her execution, Mariam commands the Nuntio to witness her death to Herod: "Tell thou my lord thou saw'st me loose my breath" (5.1.73). The dual command effected by the lose/loose ambiguity in this statement - to witness either the loss of her life or the releasing of her voice (Quilligan 214) - is appropriate to the dual command which the play makes. *Mariam* calls the reader to witness the silencing of Mariam through Herod, and of women through the ideologies of the debate. Simultaneously, by its existence the play forces the reader to witness the release of a woman's voice opposing the silencing which Mariam accepted with her death. The trial-less tyranny of the bulk of public language, which does anything but 'grace' women, is optimistically envisioned to eventually end, for although "false rumours long with credit pass'd / . . . they like rumours must conclude at last" (2.4.417-18).

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