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Closet Drama e Autoria Feminina: Uma Análise dos mecanismos de subversão da ordem e transgressão da esfera privada, problematizando o papel da mulher na sociedade do século XVII, através do estudo do closet drama "*The Tragedy of Mariam*", escrito por Elizabeth Cary.

Título em inglês- **Closet Drama and Female-Authorship**: An analysis of the mechanisms of subversion of the order and transgression of the private sphere, problematizing the role of women in 17th century society, through the study of the closet drama *The Tragedy of Mariam*, written by Elizabeth Cary.

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DEDICATÓRIA

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EPÍGRAFE

“Unhappy one, men have expelled you from the world of symbols and yet they have given you names, they have called you slave, you unhappy slave. Masters, they have exercised their right as master. They write, of their authority to accord names, that it goes back so far that the origin of language itself may be considered an act of authority emanating from those who dominate… the language you speak is made up of words that are killing you.”

Monique Wittig.

RESUMO

REBECA, Ramos Vital. **Closet Drama e Autoria Feminina**: Uma Análise dos mecanismos de subversão da ordem e transgressão da esfera privada, problematizando o papel da mulher na sociedade do século XVII, através do estudo do closet drama *The Tragedy of Mariam*, escrito por Elizabeth Cary.
2023. Trabalho de Graduação Individual (TGI) – Faculdade de Filosofia, Letras e Ciências Humanas, Universidade de São Paulo, São Paulo, 2023.

Este projeto de pesquisa tem como objetivo investigar a escrita feminina no gênero teatral *Closet Drama*, com um enfoque específico para a sua relação com o contexto sócio-histórico, ou seja, o século XVII, durante o final da era elisabetana (1558-1603), e a era jacobina (1603-1625). O ponto de partida deste estudo é o surgimento do *Closet Drama* e a consequência disto para a emergência de mulheres dramaturgas. Com base neste tema, esta pesquisa inicialmente apresentará uma breve introdução a respeito da conjuntura político-social, uma vez que as características materiais desse período parecem ter atuado diretamente para a formação desse gênero teatral. Assim, o principal objetivo desta monografia é pesquisar como as mulheres puderam subverter as normas da época, que não permitiam a autoria feminina, e escrever peças de teatro. Diante disso, será necessário compreender as dificuldades enfrentadas pelas mulheres, tanto no que se refere à luta para ter voz ativa e participação política, quanto no que concerne ao direito de se expressar pública e artísticamente, por meio da escrita e da encenação de peças. Logo, esta pesquisa pretende elucidar que as duas esferas (privada e pública) encontram-se entrelaçadas na conjuntura social do século XVII. Nesse sentido, para tornar tangível essas proposições, esta monografia examinará a obra *The Tragedy of Mariam* (1613), escrita por Elizabeth Cary (1585-1639). A escolha por essa produção pode ser compreendida sob dois aspectos: i- trata-se da primeira peça escrita e assinada por uma mulher; e ii- ela demonstra, paradigmaticamente, como havia um continuum no qual as mulheres —autoras e personagens— conseguiam burlar o sistema e apresentar seus pensamentos sob a premissa de que estes estariam restritos a um ambiente privado. O exame dessa peça abordará seus elementos dramáticos, como o Coro, entendendo a sua função nas tragédias clássicas. Finalmente, será também discorrido sobre a construção das personagens femininas e suas falas, principalmente em comparação com as elocuções masculinas. A análise nos permitirá observar como Elizabeth Cary apresenta uma crítica à sociedade patriarcal do século XVII e como esta era inconstante no que tange: ao ideal de mulher e esposa; à relação entre silêncio e virtuosidade, ou fala e licença sexual; à colocação de ‘dois pesos e duas medidas’ que postulam alguns direitos para os homens, mas ainda excluem as mulheres; e à delimitação dos papéis sociais de acordo com o gênero. Todos esses aspectos apontam para a possibilidade de Cary estar defendendo uma mudança no sistema e mais direitos para as mulheres.

Palavras-chave: Autoria feminina; *Closet Drama*; continuum; coro; direitos das mulheres; ‘dois pesos e duas medidas’; Elizabeth Cary; era Elisabetana; era Jacobina; falas; gênero; gênero dramático; ideal de mulher e esposa; licença sexual; mudança no sistema; normas; papéis sociais; participação política; personagens femininas; privado; público; século XVII; silêncio; sociedade inglesa; sociedade patriarcal; subverter a ordem; *The Tragedy of Mariam*; tragédias clássicas; virtuosidade; voz ativa.

ABSTRACT:

REBECA, Ramos Vital. **Closet Drama and Female-Authorship**: An analysis of the mechanisms of subversion of the order and transgression of the private sphere, problematizing the role of women in 17th century society, through the study of the closet drama *The Tragedy of Mariam*, written by Elizabeth Cary.
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The aim of this research project is to investigate female writing in the dramatic genre, Closet Drama, with a specific focus on its relation to its sociohistorical context, that is, the seventeenth century, during the end of the Elizabethan (1558-1603), and the Jacobean era (1603-1625). The starting point for this study is the emergence of Closet Drama and its consequences for the presence of women playwrights. Based on this theme, this research will initially present a brief introduction to the political and social context, since the material characteristics of this period seem to have played a direct role in the formation of this dramatic genre. In this regard, the main objective of this monograph is to investigate how women were able to subvert the norms of their time, which did not allow female authorship, and write plays. Therefore, it will be necessary to understand the difficulties faced by women, both in terms of the struggle to have an active voice and political participation, and in terms of the right to express themselves publicly and artistically, through the writing and staging of plays. Hence, this research aims to elucidate that the two spheres (private and public) are intertwined in the social realm of the 17th century. In order to make these propositions tangible, this monograph will examine the work *The Tragedy of Mariam* (1613), written by Elizabeth Cary (1585-1639). The choice of this production can be understood on account of two aspects: i- this is the first play written and signed by a woman; and ii- it demonstrates, paradigmatically, how there was a continuum in which women —authors and characters— were able to circumvent the system and present their thoughts under the premise that these would be restricted to a private environment. The examination of this play will look at dramatic elements such as the Chorus, understanding its function in classical tragedies. Finally, we will also discuss the construction of the female characters and their speeches, especially in comparison with the male elocutions. The analysis will allow us to observe how Elizabeth Cary presents a critique of 17th century patriarchal society and how it was fickle in terms of: the ideal of woman and wife's duty; the relationship between silence and virtuosity, or speech and sexual license; the placement of 'double standards' that postulate some rights for men, but still excluded women; and the delimitation of social roles according to gender. All these aspects point to the possibility that Cary is advocating for a change in the system claiming for more rights for women.

Keywords: Active voice; change in the system; chorus; classical tragedies; closet drama; continuum; dramatic genre; double standard; Elizabethan era; Elizabeth Cary; English society; female authorship; female characters; gender; ideal of woman; Jacobean era; norms; patriarchal society; political participation; private; public; rights for women; 17th century; sexual license; silence; social roles; speech; subverting the order; *The Tragedy of Mariam*; virtuosity; wife's duty.

SUMMARY:

METHODOLOGY

The aim of this research project was to observe how women were able to take advantage of the Closet Drama genre, and the historical circumstances of the 17th century to write plays that entered public and political discourse. More than that, these authors were able to portray the reality of the early modern period from a female perspective, inserting a critique of the patriarchal system, and the division of social roles according to gender. In order to make these concepts tangible, we chose to delimit a restricted field of study: the first play written and signed by an English woman, Elizabeth Cary, entitled *The Tragedy of Mariam* (1613). In other words, this play will work as a paradigmatic example of both this genre —closet drama— and female authorship functioning as a means to denounce the violence, inconsistencies, and arbitrability of seventeenth century male-oriented society.

Understanding that literary works can function as a form of social criticism, it was necessary to provide a brief introduction of the context in which this work was produced. To this end, the following works were mobilized: 1st-*Dramatic Difference: Gender, Class, and Genre in the Early Modern Closet Drama*, written by Karen Raber (2001); 2nd-*Shakespeare's England Life in Elizabethan and Jacobean Times*, by R. E. Pritchard (2003); 3rd-*Staging Gender, Shaping Sound in Early Modern England,* by Gina Bloom (2007); 4th-*Still Harping on Daughters: Women and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare,* by Lisa Jardine (1989); 5th-*Teoria do Drama Moderno,* by Peter Szondi (2001); 6th-*The Book of the Play: Playwrights, Stationers, and Readers in Early Modern England,* by Marta Straznicky (2006); 7th-*The Education of Gentlewomen,* by Norma Mcmulen (1977); 8th-*The Elizabethan Woman: A Panorama of English Womanhood, 1540 to 1640,* by Caroll Camden (1952); 9th-*The Heart and Stomach of a King: Elizabeth I and the Politics of Sex and Power,* by Carole Levin (2013); 10th-*The Illustrated Story of England*, written by Christopher Hidden (2016); 11th-*Tudors: The History of England from Henry VIII to Elizabeth I*, by Peter Ackroyd (2014); 12th-*The Oxford Hamlet,* edited by George Hibbard (2008); 13th- *Women and Gender in Renaissance Tragedy: A Study of King Lear, Othello, The Duchess of Malfi and The White Devil,* by Dympna Callaghan (1989); and 14th-*Writing Women in Jacobean England,* by Barbara Kiefer Lewalski (1998).

By the same token, during this initial moment, while we present an introduction to the context, it was also considered relevant to point out some aspects regarding Elizabeth Cary's biography. Faced with that, it is necessary to emphasize that we do not intend to use the narrative of her life to provide an interpretation of her play. On the other hand, we believe that reading any literary piece consists of the process of rewriting it, which means that the author's intentions or voice are less a concern than the ideas that are being constructed through intertextuality. Every reader has the power of building a different interpretation to the same text because its unity and meaning depends on its destination. That is:

> As soon as a fact is narrated no longer with a view to acting directly on reality but intransitively, that is to say, finally outside of any function other than that of the very practice of the symbol itself, this disconnection occurs, the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death, writing begins. (BARTHES, 1977, p. 142).

Thus the purpose of elucidating parts of Elizabeth Cary's biograph relies on the belief that some elements could be useful for understanding the play and the ideas being conveyed, specially the social critique that is being done. Moreover, it is also relevant to explain the importance of Elizabeth Cary's social position for her to be a writer, which means that, despite being a revolutionary period in English Literature, only certain women could make use of Closet Drama as a subversion of restrictions, being able to express themselves. The main source for this part of the monograph was the following: 1st-*A Biographical and Critical Study of the Life and Works of Elizabeth Carey, 1st Viscountess Falkland (1585-1639),* by Stephanie Wright; 2nd-*Ashgate Critical Essays on Women Writers in England, 1550-1700 Volume 6: Elizabeth Cary* (2009), by Karen Raber; 3rd-*Bathsua Makin: Woman of Learning,* by Frances Teague (1998); 4th-*Elizabeth Cary, Lady Falkland: life and letters*, ed. H. Wolfe (2001); 5th-*Literary Equivocation: Women Playwright and the Early Modern Closet*, by Nancy Paxton-Wilson (2018); 6th-*Privacy, Playreading, and Women's Closet Drama 1550-1700*, by Marta Straznicky (2004); 7th-*The Death of the Author,* by Rolland Barthes (1947); 8th-*The life of Elizabeth Lady Falkland 1585-1639*, by G. Fullerton (2023); and 9th-*The Weaker Vessel,* by Antonia Frase (1985).

The second section is dedicated to the contextualization of Closet Drama, which is the genre that will be studied throughout this monograph. For that purpose, the following theoretical propositions will be considered: 1st-*A Biographical and Critical Study of the Life and Works of Elizabeth Carey, 1st Viscountess Falkland (1585-1639),* by Stephanie Wright; 2nd-*Cavalier Drama: An historical and critical Supplement to the Study of the Elizabethan and Restoration Stage*, by Alfred Harbage (1964); 3rd-*Closet Drama History Theory Form*, by Catherine Burroughs (2018); 4th-*Don Sebastian, King of Portugal: a tragedy, acted at the Theatre Royal,* by John Dryden (1690); 5th-*Privacy, Playreading, and Women's Closet Drama 1550-1700*, by Marta Straznicky (2004); 6th-*Spectacular Politics: Theatrical Power and Mass Culture in Early Modern England,* by Paula Backscheider (1993); 7th-*Subjectivity and Women's Poetry in Early Modern England: Why on the Ridge Should She Desire to Go?,* by Lynnete Mcgrath (2017); 8th-*Tell thou my lord thou saw'st me lose my breath": Silence, speech, and authorial identity in Cary's The Tragedy of Mariam,* by Bilal Hamamra (2018); 9th-*Teoria do Drama Moderno,* by Peter Szondi (2001); 10th-*The Tudor Play of Mind: Rhetoric Inquiry and the Development of Elizabethan Drama*, by Joel Altman (1978); and 11th-*Writing Women in Jacobean England,* by Barabra Lewalski (1993).

Next, there is a brief summary of the play and some indication of what the following sections, regarding a close reading of specific aspects, will dig in. For this chapter, the main reference was the play itself, which was accessed on the Pennsylvania library website that presents a version edited by Laura June Dziuban and Mary Mark Ockerbloom. This file can be found on the index of our monograph. Moreover, the following sources were likewise accessed: 1st-*Changing the Subject: Mary Wroth and Figurations of Gender in Early Modern England,* by Naomi Miller (1996); 2nd-*Closet Drama History Theory Form*, by Catherine Burroughs (2018); 3rd-*Performing The Tragedy of Mariam and Constructing Stage Histor*y, by Ramona Wray (2015); 4th- *Privacy, Playreading, and Women's Closet Drama 1550-1700*, by Marta Straznicky (2004); 5th-*The Chorus in Elizabeth Cary's 'Tragedy of Mariam',* by Viona Falk (1995); 6th-*The Currency of Eros: Women's Love Lyric in Europe, 1540-1620,* by Ann Rosalind Jones (1990); and 7th-V*oice in Motion: Staging Gender, Shaping Sound in Early Modern England,* by Gina Bloom (2007).

The following three parts, which will deal with the analysis of the chorus, the female characters, and a brief glimpse into the possible interpretation towards Graphina, will be based on these references: 1st-*'A Moving Rhetoricke': Gender and Silence in Early Modern England,* by Christina Luckyj (2002); 2nd-*Closethed Authority in The Tragedy of Mariam,* by Miranda Nesler (2012); 3rd-C*loset Drama History Theory Form*, by Catherine Burroughs (2018); 4th-*Early Modern Women in Conversation,* by Katherine Larson (2015); 5th-*Female Performativity in 'The Tragedy of Mariam,* by Alexandra Bennett (2000); 6th- O*ppositional Voices: Women as Writers and Translators of Literature in the English Renaissance,* by Tina Krontiris (1992); 7th-*Performing Silence, Performing Speech: Genre and Gender in Stuart Drama*, by Miranda Nesler (2009); 8th-*Private Lyrics in Elizabeth Cary's Tragedy of Mariam*, by Ilona Bell (2007); 9th-*Profane Stoical Paradoxes: The Tragedie of Mariam and Sidnean Closet Drama,* by Marta Straznick (2009); 10th-*Tell thou my lord thou saw'st me lose my breath": Silence, speech, and authorial identity in Cary's The Tragedy of Mariam,* by Bilal Hamamra (2018); 11th-T*he Chorus in Elizabeth Cary's 'Tragedy of Mariam',* by Viona Falk (1995); 12th-*The Education of Gentlewomen,* by Norma Mcmulen (1977); 13th-*The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory,* by Elaine Showalter (1985); 14th-"The Spectre of Resistance", in *Staging Renaissance: Reinterpretations of Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama*, by Margaret Ferguson (1991); 15th-V*oice in Motion: Staging Gender, Shaping Sound in Early Modern England,* by Gina Bloom (2007); and 16th- *Writing Women in Jacobean Englan*d, by Barbara Lewalski (1993).

All these references are a consequence of this monograph engaging in multiple theoretical perspectives towards literary criticism. The first part of this research, as illustrated above, will deal with the context, and the description of Elizabeth Cary's biography. Therefore this section is related with the Historical-Biographical approach, which tends to consider the text within its social, political, and cultural environment. By the same token, it likewise regards the authorial figure.

When it comes to the second part of this monograph, it can be noted that, for bringing a more formal description of the genre, there are some glimpses of the Formalist approach. Nevertheless, the study of this genre is done by considering the circumstances of the seventeenth century. Hence, once again, the first theoretical criticism —Historical-Biographical— can also be observed.

Moreover, the main sections are dedicated to the analysis of the play, based on close reading, through the lenses of Post-Structuralism, and both the Sociological and the Feminist criticism. That is, we will provide an interpretation of some events from the play that argue for an intertextuality between the literary production and the society, mainly, regarding the gender roles, the lack of women's rights within the double standard of patriarchy, and the traditional ideas that associated female virtuosity with silence and confinement to the domestic sphere.

The last part of this monograph consists of the recollection of the main arguments that were presented throughout this research. There is likewise the reflection of what was learnt from all this process of reading and writing. We will, moreover, attempt to emphasize our perspective on the matter of Elizabeth Cary being a revolutionary woman who advocated for changes in the patriarchal society of the seventeenth century, while placing critiques of this system in her play, *The Tragedy of Mariam*. Although during the whole monograph we will be already critically engaging with the sources, in this final moment of conclusion, we will state our view, trying to think about the implications of the findings on the academic debate with suggestions on how to enlarge these research. This is, therefore, the part in which we will take a step further by longing for a more authorial voice.

The process for writing this monograph lasted for two semesters, beginning in the second part of 2023, and ending in September of 2024. Each month was delimited with specific goals and plannings, creating an agenda that organized the time for researching different topics, writing the sections, and reviewing them. There were moments for meetings with the coordinator of this research in which there was time for feedback, discussions, and corrections. At the end, the final version of this monograph was also evaluated by two other professors.

OBJECTIVE:

This project has as its ultimate goal to analyze how women manage to integrate public and political debate through Closet Drama, a genre that is intrinsically dichotomous once it undermines the division between private and public. As a result, this monograph will be dedicated to the analysis of the first play written, and signed by an English woman, named Elizabeth Carry: *The Tragedy of Mariam* (1613). The idea is to observe how this theatrical genre, which emerged on account of specific historical features, allowed women to engage in the public realm, and break the conventions towards female silence, by addressing political and social themes. More specifically, this research intends to elucidate the techniques used by Elizabeth Cary, in her play, to conceal critiques towards the patriarchal and male-oriented society of the early modern period. Engaging in the contemporary discussion about *The Tragedy of Mariam*, this monograph will try to counter the interpretations that regarded this play as endorsing female subjection. It will be argued that Elizabeth Cary not only advocates and legitimates female speech but also problematizes the inconsistencies from the 17th century, which allowed, through the opposition of gender roles, a double standard for men and women. Moreover, this research aims to demonstrate how the internalization of these values were responsible for diminishing the women's possibility of envisioning a different social arrangement once they, either consciously or not, perpetuate the violence, from the patriarchal system, against each other.

INTRODUCTION:

As it was previously stated, this research intends to both investigate and elucidate the ways through which women could subvert the order from the patriarchal society, integrating public and political debate, on account of the dichotomy of the Closet Drama, which was not written to be performed but could still achieve public dissemination because of the press. The main reason that motivated the choice for this theme was the perception that there was a lack of studies regarding female authorship during the early modern period. As a matter of fact, despite being an undergraduate student of the English course at USP, it was only when we took a semester abroad at Radboud University, in the Netherlands, that we were introduced to this dramatic genre. During six months, we had classes at a course named “Fools and Furies: The Early Modern Stage”, and the main expectation was to explore the most important name for the Golden Age of British literature: Shakespeare. Although this was indeed a major topic of study, the lecturer, Sonja Kleij, also dedicated some classes to explain the Closet Drama, focusing on its importance for women to subvert the restrictions from the patriarchal society of that time, while writing their own plays.

During the early modern period, there was a double standard which excluded women from social and public participation, which means that, according to the moral standards, they should engage only in the domestic environment, confining their thoughts, minds, and bodies, exclusively, to the authority of their husbands. As a result, they were apart from the social environment: women could not participate either in the political debate or in the decisions that, nevertheless, interfere in their lives. By the same token, they could neither integrate nor take advantage of the cultural, and literary development that had a huge growth during the Elizabethan period. To put into other words, the writers, the actors, and even the audience was mostly made of men, and the female participants who ventured themselves to watch the performances were, usually, look askance.

The absence of women writers, in the seventeenth century, was regarded for us as an unquestionable truth, until we were presented with the Closet Drama genre. It is widespread the notion of the existence of pseudonyms, which allowed female writers, as long as their identities were under cover. However, is it possible that some women could sidestep the conservative ideology while not only writing but also

signing literary works? That question, perhaps naive on account of our lack of knowledge, was answered during the lectures taken in the Netherlands, more specifically, when we had the opportunity to read and discuss *The Tragedy of Mariam,* considered to be the first play written and signed by an English woman, Elizabeth Cary, in 1613.

Once aware of both this genre and the historical context in which it became popular, that is, a moment that public performance was prohibited, the initial idea for this research emerged. We were curious to understand how the censorship, extremely strong at that period, did not regard female authorship as a problem, even though we could perceive many ‘gaps’, within the Closet Drama, that allowed women to subvert the *status quo*, for instance, by running with a public voice. Was it possible that not only were the lines between private and public blurred but also that the core of the laws and values which sustained the seventeenth century society had been undermined?

To start with, the very structure of the Closet Drama genre is ambivalent: plays not intended to be performed could, nevertheless, achieve a broad distribution through the press. As a consequence, under the premise of a restricted audience, female playwrights could express both their internal thoughts, and thus a critique of the patriarchal system, and also depict the formal arrangements of their society. For the first time, then, there was a continuum in which a woman represented the social circles and, more importantly, depicted female characters. In other words, the perspective was no longer structured under the male gaze which created expectations that divided gender roles both in social standards and in terms of moral appraisal.

The truth of the matter is that the theater was what cinema is for the contemporary and globalized world: a way of subscribing to conventions that shaped and interfered with the construction of subjectivity. Although such features were already embedded in the social sphere and, ergo, played a major role in the creation of literary works, it is undeniable that the cultural productions are responsible for streamlining, reinforcing, or sometimes, refusing these conventions. Even though not fully apart from the traditional patriarchal ideology, the plays as *The Tragedy of Mariam* indicate an attempt to break free from these values, creating a female gaze. Similarly, this likewise generated a change in the approaches to spectatorship, which means that men and women were receiving a different point of view, and could

reflect upon it. In other words, as previously emphasized, even if these plays were not performed, people could still have access to these ideas, once they were printed and distributed. It is in light of this achievement that we could comprehend in which ways female writers, such as Elizabeth Cary, while mirroring their realities, placed not only a problematization of them but also advocated for a change in the misogynist system. Taking *The Tragedy of Mariam* as a paradigmatic example of the Closet Drama genre, and the phenomena of female playwrights, we aimed to analyze, in depth, how Cary mobilized the dramatic elements —chorus, monologues, soliloquies, and the construction of the characters— as a means to demonstrate and criticize the issues faced by women during early modern England.

As a matter of fact, while reading the play, some questions came to our mind, and they are actually subscribed to both the female as well as male characters actions and speech, and the chorus, which represents the traditional views. Why were only men allowed to divorce? Could it be that wedlock, instead of being the happy ending portrayed in the comedies, functioned as a mechanism that enclosed women, regarding not only their sexuality but also their right to speak their minds? How has the change in society, regarding the different rules of Elizabeth I and James I, as well as the religious aspect, generated inconsistency and doubts towards the gender roles and the ideals of virtuosity?

More importantly, by representing the death of Mariam, on account of her free speech, while Salome —the real villain— has a happy ending, Elizabeth Cary is questioning the very own idea of poetic justice placing the following dilemma: Was Mariam indeed unfaithful? Did she deserve her death? These questions claim an active reader who has to reflect upon the values of their own society, and analyze whether they make sense. Additionally, by promoting such a critical thought, Cary is deconstructing the idea that this male-oriented social organization, which is based on a double standard, arbitrary violence, misuse of power, and the subordination of women, is based on natural laws. On the other hand, such a structure is socially constructed. As a consequence, it is possible to rearrange this system making it more equal and guaranteeing rights for women.

Regarding the last paragraphs, it is noticeable that the main motive behind our monograph was the interest in enlarging the research regarding female authorship in the seventeenth century. Historically, women writers have always been suppressed, as a reflection of our society continuing to be male centered. Only within

the Feminist Criticism, and the social changes that allowed, increasingly, though not without many fights, more rights for women that the literary critiques have started to pay more attention to female authorship and the representation of women. Who better to denounce the issues faced by women, during the early modern period, than a female author that had to fit in the traditional expectations or even accept the prejudices for not adjusting?

It is known that the seventeenth century is a very prominent moment for English Literature, and for the English language, being Shakespeare and the other writers of that time responsible for the establishment of this idiom. In an age in which the system was even more misogynist with the laws made, essentially, by men for both men and women, it is no surprise to see that, even nowadays, we continue to privilege the male authors by focusing on researching them. We do not intend to dismiss the canon or the great names and productions of that century. Nevertheless, we aim to emphasize the works conceived by female authors, giving them their due importance for cultural and social formation.

As a result, it can likewise be concluded that this research will be based on the intertwined of history and literature. In other words, we intend to take a cultural production, *The Tragedy of Mariam*, and read it in relation to its social, historical, political, economical, and religious contexts. What does the construction of the characters, the theme of the play, the soliloquies, speeches, and even the dilemmas depicted throughout the plot have to say about the seventeenth century society? More specifically, how are women portrayed? How does the plot treat female characters that have public speech? Is it always the same procedure? What does the fate of each of the characters suggest about the moral values and ethics of Elizabeth Cary's time? Are the events in the play endorsing or rejecting such aspects? And, for being a Closet Drama that invites the readers to take sides, while reflecting about the ideologies they had internalized, there is also space for the following questions: How do I, as the reader, feel about this play? What is it telling me, and where do I stand in relation to that?

These questions, and the principle of analyzing the play as a cultural product that is embedded in a specific time and place, seems to be, precisely, the main motive behind the drama: work as a mechanism that documents, scrutinizes, and oftentimes, denounces parts of human history. That is:

> O ponto de partida terminológico restringe-se, assim, ao conceito de drama. Como conceito histórico, ele dá conta de um fenômeno da história literária: o drama que surge na Inglaterra elisabetana ganha corpo sobretudo na França seiscentista e se mantém vivo no classicismo alemão. Uma vez que ele evidencia o que se sedimenta na forma dramática como enunciado sobre a existência humana, ele legitima um fenômeno da história literária como documento da história da humanidade. Cabe ao conceito descobrir nas exigências técnicas do drama o reflexo de exigências existenciais; a totalidade por ele projetada não é de natureza sistemática, antes histórico-filosófica. A história, proscrita, se encerrou nos abismos que separam as formas poéticas e só a reflexão sobre ela pode alçar pontes capazes de transpô-las. (SZONDI, 2011, p. 20).

Faced with the above-mentioned proposition, in order to elucidate the connection between history and literature, and how *The Tragedy of Mariam* problematizes the patriarchal features from the seventeenth century, this research will be divided into the following parts. Initially, it is necessary to briefly scrutinize both the context in which the Closet Drama started to be produced, in the early modern stage, and the literary productions of this period. In other words, before specifically focusing on the Closet Drama, we will analyze what used to be the most prestigious genders during that moment: tragedy and comedy. This will make it possible for us to comprehend which social, economical, and political aspects were responsible for this shift in theater, incentivizing the dissemination of the Closet Drama.

Along with that, knowing the moral, religious and ethical ideas that were popular at this historical moment is likewise relevant, once they are responsible for determining the division of the gender roles in society. This will explain why women were not allowed either to perform or to write plays, after all, they had no right to integrate the public sphere, being restricted to the domestic environment. As a matter of fact, understanding how society was structured and what was expected by men and women is essential from comprehending the shift that was, mainly, introduced with the Closet Drama: the subversion of restrictions within women being able to integrate not only the literary and theatrical production but also, while writing these plays, convey ideas that showed their desire to be part of the political world, so far, accessible only to men.

In light of this, as it will be further developed, it is noticeable that some Closet Dramas present claims and discussions that are extremely contemporary and connected to what is now understood as a Feminist approach. In *The Tragedy of Mariam*, there are, for instance, the following topics being placed in the female characters' speech: the defense of women's right to divorce; the women's ability to rule a country; their desire to control their minds, speech, and bodies, specifically, by choosing with whom of even if they want to get married; the collocation of wedlock not as a happy ending for the female characters but as a way to enclosure and control women; a problematization of the traditional ideas associated with the ideal of womanhood, which related public speech with sexual license and silence with virtuosity; the presence of a double standard that guaranteed inconsistency only to men; and a critique of the ambivalent as well as dichotomic norms of the seventeenth century, showing the dialectical procedure between private and/or domestic environment and public sphere. By addressing all these matters, either explicitly or implicitly, Elizabeth Cary and her characters are not only questioning the 'natural' differences between men and women but also undermining such a colocation, once they show this notion is actually socially constructed.

Within this initial section, we will also emphasize some important biographical aspects regarding Elizabeth Cary's trajectory while becoming a writer. Despite agreeing that a literary work neither can nor should be read as a fictional portrayal of their writer's life, the reason why we decided to bring Cary's personal history relies on our belief that she has been disregarded for way too long. Our attempt, then, is to call attention to the challenges faced by her, and how this was a consequence of her being a woman from the seventeenth century who, nevertheless, belonged to the elite. This demonstrates that intersectionality operates in the process of increasing or diminishing the oppression and repression suffered by the female figures in the patriarchal society.

On a second moment, we will deal with the origin of Closet Drama, which can be traced back to the ancient philosophical dialogues. The idea is to investigate which features are typical of this genre. Additionally, this section will also point out the dilemma involving many of these plays: whether they were really intended to be only read, or if the female writers also envisioned the possibility of their productions being performed. It is known that some of those plays had stage directions, which explained how the actors should perform the scene, being, therefore, a resource

unnecessary for the readers. Consequently, the presence of these notes may indicate that not only did the female writers glimpse the performance of their plays but also that some of them were actually performed in front of a small audience at private houses. This enlarged the level of subversion of the female writers who could sidestep the system by both writing and having their plays published in the press, and through the performances that happened in the household's environment.

The third part of this monograph consists of a summary of the plot from *The Tragedy of Mariam*, as well as a brief introduction to the aspects that will be investigated during the following close-reading sections. These subchapters will outline, mainly: i- the role played by the Chorus, while showing the contradictions in the seventeenth century society, and also the inconsistencies in the patriarchal system. For that matter, this section will read the Chorus in relation to the tradition, based on Greek and Latin productions. We will argue that this dramatic element represents one specific point of view, which is not necessarily the position being defended throughout the play; ii- the construction of female characters, and how they interact with each other. This part will look into the attempt of these women to run with public voice, and whether or not they are punished for this behavior. Moreover, we will demonstrate that the characterization is relational, which means that the characters need to be read in comparison to the others. The analysis of the female characters will elucidate how Elizabeth Cary could take advantage of the Closet Drama to give voice to her women, while they claim for a social change, which means they advocate for rights and express critiques towards the patriarchal and authoritarian system. Nevertheless, while witnessing their oppressive interactions, we will argue that women had internalized the values from the misogynist society, reproducing its violence with one another; iii- an analysis of Graphina, the only female character who, apparently, differs from the rest. In this part, we will propose an interpretation for Graphina, reading her passage as a metadramatic moment which envisions the subversive power of the Closet Drama. That happens because this character problematizes the ideals regarding speech and silence, that is, her performance questions whether or not silence can be a form of resistance to male authority.

During all three parts, we observed a shift in the representation and characterization of men who are portrayed as less active and, most of the time, their actions generate not empathy but despise. Thus, the readers have access to a

perspective, within the plot, that is much more associated with the women and their struggles, which also voiced the female author's desires and concerns regarding their own society. Faced with that, the analysis will consider these three elements —Chorus, female and male characters— while trying to show the tools used by Elizabeth to demonstrate her portrayal of society, which is done with a severe critique of both the patriarchal system and the consequences of its features. For this matter, the close-reading analysis will bring specific excerpts from the play to exemplify such ideas.

1-THE EARLY MODERN STAGE DURING THE 16th AND 17th CENTURIES.

The Closet Drama was produced in different centuries, rules, and historical events in England, along the early modern stage, and even during the Romantic period. However, it was first established as a genre during the Elizabethan Era (1558-1603), which means that the Closet Drama was being produced at the same time that many of Shakespeare and Christoper Marlowe's plays were also being written. As a consequence, it is noticeable that, at this initial moment, this new genre was not well diffused because the most prestigious plays were tragedies as well as its variations, such as the Revenge Tragedy, and, later on, comedies. In fact, the reign of Elizabeth I was fundamental for the history of theater, being considered for many researchers as the peak of English Drama development, once the Queen showed an unprecedented interest in theatrical art.

Faced with that, many professional actors received support from the monarchy, in the same way that different playwrights were under Elizabeth I patronage. The participation of Elizabeth I in court entertainment became the best means of popularizing theatrical performance which instigated people to frequent the theater. Nevertheless, the writers did not have the freedom to either write about every topic they wished or to express opinions that would be considered as a transgression to the order. On the other hand, before every performance, after the playwright finished his production, a special official would analyze the manuscript and censor it, if needed. During this previous analysis, lines, excerpts from the plot, and even entire parts of the play could be removed, in case they were considered as problematic for the social order, mainly, focusing on the presence of critiques of both the aristocracy and the monarchy. After that, there was likewise an inspection done by the mayor's court who were responsible to certify that the play did not convey any unvirtuous and obscene behavior that could corrupt the audience and generate public disorder.

The reign of Elizabeth I represented a change in the conception of art and culture, after all, it was the first time in which the artists and common people could step aside the old values that were imposed by the Medieval Church. The 16th Century inaugurated what was later known as 'Renaissance', and this scientific as well as cultural movement generated a revolution not only in society but also in the popular beliefs that sustained this institution. Although religion was still important,

during this moment, the playwrights were allowed to shift the traditional plots, which were focused on teaching the good religious behavior that would be approved by God, and entering into the dilemmas faced by human beings. As a result, even if the Christian assumptions were still an ongoing theme in the plays and in society, the performances were essentially humanist, which became a typical feature of the Renaissance. This allowed the playwrights to envision different plots, and narratives, which were constructed with some specificities. In other words, the productions of that period were, essentially, “uma forma de arte na qual, em última instância, dois aspectos são imprescindíveis: o embate intersubjetivo entre os homens e sua relação com a comunidade que os cerca.”[1]

As previously suggested, during the Elizabethan period, the most popular plays were, unquestionably, the tragic ones, such as: *Dido, Queen of Carthage* (1594), *Doctor Faustus* (1604), *Edward II* (1592), by Christopher Marlowe; *Hamlet,* (1599), *Othello* (1603), *Romeo and Juliet* (1597), by Shakespeare (1597); and *The Duchess of Malfi*, by John Webster (1612-13).Within the tragedies, there was the representation of noble and high citizens, from aristocratic origins, with social status that, on account of a flaw, suffered a downfall. However, even if the portrayed was restricted to a certain social class, the idea was to teach all citizens about human passion and how they should 'cleanse' their souls through the catharsis, which guaranteed that the vicious conduit, depicted by the tragic hero, would not be reproduced. Moreover, with the comedies, there was a deeper emphasis on human actions that showed the good and bad of normal people on a daily basis. This made it easier for the audience to relate with the intrigues, disguises, plots, and the situations experienced by the characters and, therefore, theater became much more popular. Additionally, they also portrayed a satire from society, working as a social critique full of morality. Some example of popular comedies at that time were: *Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595), *Merchant of Venice* (1598), *Twelfth Night* (1601), *As you Like It* (1623), by William Shakespeare; *Every Men in His Humour* (1598), *Volpone* (1606), *The Alchemist* (1610), by Ben Jonson.

It is interesting to note that the tragedies seem to, mainly, place male protagonists, being phallocentric, whereas the comedies have women as their most prominent figures. This change is also observed in terms of the portrayal of both

[1]SZONDI, Peter. *Teoria do Drama Moderno*, 2001, p. 7.

male and female characters: in the tragedies, men are heroes, virtuous, and from noble birth who, nonetheless, on account of a flaw, suffer a downfall from the reversal of fortune; whereas, in the comedies, women are, oftentimes, smarter than the men, being able to deceive, and plot against them. Moreover, if closely analyzed, many tragedies appear to have the female characters as central for the reversal of fortune, whether it is by their action, such as in *Oedipus*, or even because of their speech. The idea that a woman can have a transgressive tongue is present in the Bible, after all, Eve's speech is what convinces Adam to eat the fruit from the condemned tree:

> The association between female speech and tragedy is linked with the prevailing comparison of women to Eve, whose persuasion of Adam to eat from the fruits of the forbidden tree shattered the established divine order and brought about sin and death. (JARDINE, 1983, p. 110-11.)

Nevertheless, even if the tragedies continue to endorse this idea, there are several examples of female characters that, rather than being the one to blame for the downfall of the tragic hero, are victims of the absolutist patriarchal rule. This will be better explained later on, for now it is relevant to note the early modern prescription concerning women's speech and sexual looseness, as well as a source of corruption, which could be observed in the dramatic productions. In fact, such a theme is, in many ways, problematized in *The Tragedy of Mariam*.

While Elizabeth ruled, there were performances everyday and they were placed into two types of theaters: public (the Theatre, the Globe, the Curtain, the Swan); and private (Blackfriars). The private theaters, which were located in London, corresponded to indoor and more restricted spaces which comforted only a short and selected number of people to watch the performance —mainly aristocrats and members of the monarchy—. Those playhouses could indeed guarantee such a restricted audience, especially, because they charged extremely high prices for the entrance. Whereas, the public theaters, located outside the city's boundaries, were more open to the public, which made it possible for different parts of society to enjoy the pleasure of the performances.

Nevertheless, the audience was majority composed of men, regardless of which kind of theater. Even though women were allowed to attend the dramatic performance, those who did it were, usually, criticized. In fact, the structure of theater

itself contributed to the establishment of a male focused attendance: all the roles were played by men, which means that even the female characters were performed by young boys. This dialogues with the common sense of that time, which distinguished the gender roles on two poles, although not that separated and steady as it seemed to be believed back in there: the public sphere, which was supposed to be restricted to male participation; and private/domestic environment, the prototypical space occupied by women. Under this regard, men were responsible for integrating social life, being able to express their political ideas and perspectives on different matters.

On the other hand, women were expected to be well-behaved, pure, and virtuous while staying home, looking after their household and kids, confining their thoughts, strictly, to their husbands. Consequently, women were apart from social life and could neither achieve political participation nor express their opinion in a public manner. Accordingly, they were supposed to be subordinate and obedient to their husband's wishes, and commands. Regarding this social distinction based on gender, it can be understood why both the theater and the stage were not considered suitable for ladies: besides being a public and collective place, such an environment could both corrupt and promote lascivious behavior.

Furthermore, faced with this scenario, it can likewise be assumed that women were not allowed to write plays and, though there are some indications that they may have subverted this order by signing their plays with a male's name, the common feature of the time was the exclusion of female in any activity that would make it possible for them to join collective debate or engage in social matters. Therefore, for a long period society could only be glimpsed through the lenses of a male perspective. In fact, this statement is true for both the early modern period, the contemporary reading of it, and the historical assumptions made about that time, after all, the scholars were only able to grasp the reality that was written by male writers. As a result, understanding the features of that time was only possible by assuming that men could speak for women, and depict whichever ideas, feelings, and issues they may have had, regarding the gender discourse and difference.

The outcome is that, even in the literary criticism and in the historiographical reading of the early modern period, there is an absence of the female voice. In this light, it is not only possible but also necessary to question whether or not there is a gap between the reference and the element being referenced, respectively, women,

and the way they were portrayed in the plays. In a way, the ideas conveyed by the great names of English literature —Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Christopher Marlow— were crucial for, simultaneously, give shape and reinforce the aspects regarding an ideal towards womanhood. Those playwrights could construct different female characters, and by deciding their fates, they could either condemn or praise their conduct. The female audience, thus, while watching or reading the performances, could learn how to behave in order to be a virtuous woman. Moreover, the plays worked as a vehicle that not only reproduced the features for the early modern period patriarchal society but also could engender specific discourses, as the one related to the gender roles.

It was only within the advent of Closet Drama that women could have the first mechanisms, regarding the Literary Feminist Historiography, to voice their thoughts, concerns, and advocate —even if in a subtle way— for their aspiring rights. As it will be observed with the analysis of *The Tragedy of Mariam*, female authors were able to problematize the conventions of their time, and question its authority since they started to:

> rewrite discourses which repress or diminish women— patriarchy, gender hierarchy, Petrarchism, Pauline marriage theory, and more— by redefining or extending their terms or infusing them with new meanings: this is the way any orthodoxy is first opened to revisionism. (LEWALSKI, 1991, p. 4).

As stated before, the Elizabethan Era is considered to be the “Golden Age” of the English Theater, and it is also known that this period was essential for the development and stabilization of the English language, specially through the writing of plays, for instance, Shakespeare played a major role in determining the structure of English literature and language. Besides that, when it comes to politics, Elizabeth had utmost authority, and she justified this under the assumption that God chose her to have the divine right to rule. Although Elizabeth had the power, she was also advised by the Privy Council, which was formed by a group of men who were either nobles, gentry, or special members of the Church. Even so, both Parliament and the Privy Council were tightly controlled by Queen Elizabeth who not only decided when to set up a meeting but also which topics were going to be addressed on their agenda. Furthermore, all the laws would only be passed on if the Queen approved

them, which generated, during her reign and also resonated on the following rules, some discontentment when it comes to the Privy Council and the Parliament who wanted more political participation.

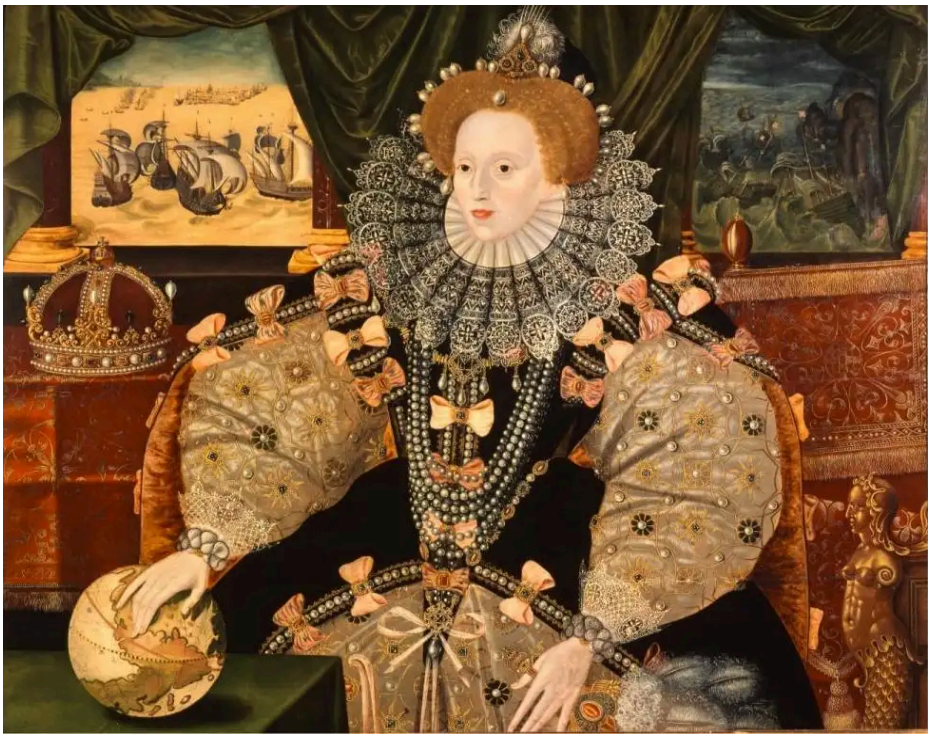
Along with that, Elizabeth I also struggled with the critiques of the Puritans who were one of her biggest challenges once they aspired for the Protestant change. As it is known, England used to have a Catholic reign for over a thousand years until Henry VII, the father of Elizabeth I, decided to become the head of the Protestant Church. After this change, England went through many conflicts and alternances between Catholic and Protestant monarchs, which caused tensions and generated a division in the population who had different faiths. It was, therefore, necessary, in order to ensure national security, to establish a certain uniformity when it comes to religion. When Elizabeth I ascended the throne becoming the Queen, she changed the official religion of England to Protestantism. However, she created specific religious settlements that make it legal for some of the Catholic traditions to be practiced. By making these exceptions, the Queen aspired for a more peaceful atmosphere, avoiding conflicts with the Catholics. Nevertheless, many Protestants were unsatisfied with her tolerance to Catholicism, which led to a growing criticism of her authority. Moreover, despite the Acts she passed along with the Parliament, which allowed some Catholics traditions to continue to be professed, she could not avoid the threats and attempts of plots from both the Catholics and the Puritans.

The most famous plot was a consequence of another issue faced by Elizabeth I: the widespread belief that she was not supposed to be the Queen of England since she was the illegitimate daughter of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn. In other words, the Catholics did not recognize Elizabeth as the rightful Queen, after all, they did not accept divorce, which means that the marriage between Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn was not only illegal but also that Elizabeth was the result of a sin. Accordingly, Mary, Queen of the Scots, was the legitimate successor of Henry VII. Contrary to Elizabeth I, Mary was a fervorous Catholic and, therefore, she was an important figure for the Catholic plots, which supported her attempt to ascend to the throne. However, Queen Elizabeth managed to control the plots and Mary, The Queen of Scots, was executed.

Besides the great achievements towards the establishment of the English language and the massive literary production, Elizabeth I's reign guaranteed an enlargement of the humanist and classical education for women, from the aristocratic

class. In other words, the fascinating image of this Queen was capable of not only allowing women to pursue such an education but also inspiring them to do it. While it could be questioned whether Elizabeth I had real authority as a ruler, since she was an unmarried woman, it is undeniable that she was capable of dealing with many attacks. One of the main reasons for her alleged triumph is the fact that she was, constantly, reinforcing herself and her image as a strong, determined, and fearless woman. This could be observed through the way she is depicted on her self-portraits, and specially in the Armada Portrait, which celebrates her victory against the Spanish Armada in 1588.

PICTURE 1- ARMADA PORTRAIT



Unknown English Artist, formerly attributed to George Gower, 1588.
SOURCE:https://artuk.org/learn/learning-resources/the-superpower-of-looking-queen-elizabeth-i-and-the-spanish-armada. Retrieved on: 12/03/2024.

The painting above demonstrates how Elizabeth I managed to elaborate a massive propaganda campaign that emphasized her power, and ability as a ruler. In this portrait, it is possible to observe her as a central figure that is in control of everything. There is the representation of the crown, which, despite being on the left side of the picture, is big enough to call attention to Elizabeth as a monarch.

Additionally, the painting at the back of her portrait demonstrates, exactly, a representation of the Spanish Armada, inciting the English winning. Finally, the subtle detail of Elizabeth placing one of her hands on the globe indicates the attempt of expanding and enlarging the British Empire and its conquests. In this regard, the Queen could establish herself as, somehow, associated with a masculine approach while still being a woman. In her own words, and here it can be grasped the ideological opposition between gender roles: “I may have the body of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a King.”[2] In a way, then, Elizabeth was aware of the cultural and political constraints imposed on women, and could defend her ability and alleged divine right to rule.

After the death of Queen Elizabeth I, also known as “The Virgin Queen”, she was succeeded by King James of Scotland, her first cousin, who established the Union of Crowns between England and Ireland. During his rule (1603-1625), the issues faced by the previous Queen, regarding the religious aspects, were increased. This can be exemplified with “The Gunpowder Plot” (1605) which was an attempt, organized by Guy Fawkes and the Catholics, to blow up both the King and the Parliament. King James I tried to minimize the impacts of the religious conflicts and stop the rebellions by establishing the “King James Bible” (1611), an important achievement for the English language and also for, somehow, bringing together the perspectives of both Protestants and Catholics. In this very same year, the King decided to dissolve the Parliament, mainly on account of their disapproval of the raising of taxes, a measure that was taken by James I. However, due to the Thirty Years War, in 1621, the King decided to reestablish the Parliament. Despite his efforts to control the foreign policy and the war, King James continued to advocate for royal absolutism, disregarding not only the Parliamentarians' perspectives on the matter but also their claim to have more political power on calling the decisions. As a consequence, in December 1621, King James I dissolved the Parliament once again, which generated great discontent among the English population. This is why, when Charles I, son of James I, succeeded the throne in 1625, he faced a lot of rebellions.

When it comes to theater, King James I inherited the drama culture from the Elizabethan period. The performances became even more popular and theater was

[2] LEVIN, Carole. *The Heart and Stomach of a King: Elizabeth I and the Politics of Sex and Power*, 2017, p.1.

the main leisure activity. Nevertheless, the interests of the public were changing: on account of the increase in the Renaissance movement, people wanted to see even more realistic representation of the human's behavior. Therefore, the plots started to be more violents and driven by the character's selfishness and ambitions, which was fulfilled by a subgenre of tragedy: the Revenge Tragedy. The plays represented the worst and vicious actions of an individual who would not measure efforts for achieving his goals. Some performances are paradigmatic of this, for instance: *The White Devil*, and *The Duchess of Malfi*, written by John Webster. In those plays, the audience accompanies the trajectory of the main characters who, extremely wise, although violent, perpetrated crimes.

As seen with Elizabeth I, King James maintained the patronage of some selected authors who earned for writing plays according to the court's interest. Moreover, censorship still had an important role in deciding whether the plays could be performed, or if they would have to be rearranged in order to keep the good moral, as well as to avoid any possibility of criticizing King James. Even though this period seemed to have had a more liberty of expression when it comes to the representation of sex and acts of violence, James I, as an absolutist monarch, did not allow the playwrights to show political views that would be considered corruptive of the order and the *status quo*. That was in sharp contrast to what the authors intended, after all, as it is mentioned in Hamlet, the function of drama is "*to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature, to show…the very age and body of the time his form and pressure*".[3]

Additionally, the Jacobean era is known for being a regressive period for women, placing a step back to the classical education undertaken during the Tudor's rule. During the early modern age, there were different perspectives upon whether women should or not have access to education. In fact, the "Tudor-Stuart period saw a continuous controversy about the nature of women and her proper place in society",[4] such contradictions will be later observed in the dialogues from *The Tragedy of Mariam,* which was published during King James I rule, more specifically, in 1613. On the one hand, there were those who believed women to be "idealized companions for man",[5] while giving them nurture, care, and guidance. In this regard,

[3] HIBBARD, George. *The Oxford Hamlet*, act 3, scene 2, lines 21-24, 2008.
[4] MCMULEN, Norma. *The Education of English Gentlewomen 1540-1640*, 1977, p. 87.
[5] Idem, p. 87.

the humanist values, which became important during the Renaissance, seemed to be the main driving force both on the reading about female characterization and on their social function. On the other hand, there was an opposite view which considered women to be “spoiled, seductive, and a definitive evil influence on man”,[6] being Eve the prototypical example of that. These ideas were based, mainly, on the Stoic philosophy, a few passages of the Scripture, and also the teachings of church fathers as Chrysostom, Jerome, and Tertullian.

Indeed, the contradictory ideology about women could be observed in the traditional plays, with the playwrights choice to depict the female characters as examples of purity or the force that led men to their misfortunes. As it will be further elaborated, in *The Tragedy of Mariam*, this opposition is placed by the antagonism of two female characters who, respectively, represent the ideas mentioned before: Mariam; and Salome. Nevertheless, even the representations in the plays are not exactly stable, after all, when it comes to Shakespeare’s tragedy *Othello*, Desdemona could be comprehended under both conceptions. From one angle, Desdemona is loyal, pure, and faithful to Othello, which does not guarantee her a decent fate. Thus, according to the justification of what motivated Othello to murder his beloved wife, the following question can be made, and depending on the answer there are different comprehensions regarding the two views about women: If his jealousy is a sign of a *hamartia,* then could it be that Desdemona is just a victim of his lack of control? In fact, considering that this female character tries, many times, to convince her husband about her loyalty, instead of being associated with evil, her speech is an attempt to escape from her husband’s arbitrary violence.

As a result, Othello’s downfall is not only caused by his own behavior but it is also a consequence of his deafness in relation to Desdemona’s speech. In a way, then, her voice, actions, and even her final fate contribute to a moral elevation. Accordingly, both Othello and also Iago’s speech are associated with murder, treachery, tyranny, and religious hypocrisy. On the other hand, regarding the moral standards of that period and the gender ideology that placed together women’s speech and sexuality, Desdemona could be understood as the one to blame, for being, somehow, a seductive woman. For “just as silence is equated with chastity

[6] MCMULEN, Norma. *The Education of English Gentlewomen 1540-1640*, 1977, p. 87.

and obedience, female utterance is equated with unruliness."[7] As a consequence, since women's speech and infidelity were intricate, by punishing the female characters who were outspoken in the stage, there was a lesson being taught about moral appraisal, within the reassertion of the patriarchal control of women's voice. Although this monograph does not intend to find a final answer to whether Desdemona's death lacks poetic justice, it is interesting to observe that the controversy explained in the last paragraphs was also noticeable in the literary production of that time.

In face of the dichotomy view about women, there were also diverging notions about what kind of education was appropriate to them. Those in favor of educating the gentlewomen associated education with the enlargement of virtuosity, by allowing them to have contact with the religious faith and values. By the same token, they advocate that a well-educated woman could have a "more advantageous marriage."[8] Whereas those who were contrary, feared that women would use their knowledge to engage in the reading of frivolous and inappropriate texts, instead of the religious ones. For them learning Latin and Greek was a great danger because it would make it possible for women to understand the "licentious activities of the classical gods and heroes".[9] Finally, they problematize if education could really guarantee better marital prospects once it could also happen that those women may not find "a suitable mate, that is, one more advanced intellectually than she".[10]

King James I seemed to agree with the second perspective, by emphasizing the need of women to subordinate themselves to the image of a patriarch, that is, first their fathers, and then, their husbands. This view advocated for the end of female education:

> In theory— King James' theory articulated in The Trew Lawe of Free Monarchie and Basilikom Doron— the absolute power of God Supreme Patriarch is imaged in the absolute monarch of the state, and in the husband and father of a family. A woman's subjection, first to her father and then to her husband, supposedly imaged the subjunction of all English people to their monarch, and of all Christians to God. (LEWALSKI, 1991, p.2)

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[7] CALLAGHAN, Dympna. *Women and Gender in Renaissance Tragedy: A Study of King Lear, Othello, The Duchess of Malfi and The White Devil*, 1989, p. 82.
[8] Idem, p. 87.
[9] Ibidem, p. 87.
[10] Ibidem, p. 87.

Besides the regression on women's education, during the Jacobean period there was also an enlargement of "antifeminist or overtly misogynist sermons, tracts, and plays detailing women's physical and mental defects, spiritual evils, rebelliousness, shrewishness, and natural inferiority to men in the hierarchy of being."[11] Nevertheless, even though the sexual and social roles were still responsible for determining to which extent women could have access to education, achieving intellectual accomplishments, during the Renaissance, and mainly on account of the Closet Drama, they could compose plays that, although temporarily, suspended the hierarchies based on gender, once they were equally able to join the act of creation. As it will be observed with *The Tragedy of Mariam*, some female playwrights could glimpse literary mechanisms to contest the places that were assigned to them during the early modern period patriarchal society. Indeed, the very writer of this play seemed to have suffered from the context of the Jacobean period, after all, Elizabeth Cary, although a well-educated woman, had many conflicts towards her emancipation and autonomy. Briefly explaining, because in the next section we will take a closer look at Cary's biography, she tried to pursue her own religion and to take care of her family as she wished. However, her attempts were always in struggle with the time's ideal of women's obedience and the expected female duty. As a result, it could be mooted that Cary makes use of her own experiences to write her play, which, in many aspects, describes Mariam, the main character, as "a queen-wife subjected to domestic and political tyranny"[12] which "profoundly challenges patriarchal control within marriage".[13]

After the death of James I, his son, Charles I, became the new King of Great Britain and Ireland (1625-1649). As his father, Charles was an authoritarian monarch who ruled under the absolutist system and, therefore, he faced many rebellions and conflicts with the Parliament who was already unsatisfied with the measures taken by the previous King. As a consequence, besides inheriting disagreements with Parliament from the time of his father, he also made this context worse by engaging in two different wars, which did not generate any benefit for England, respectively the conflicts against Spain —the Anglo-Spanish War (1625-1630)— and France —the Anglo-French War (1627-1629). Furthermore, since the wars were proving to be a

[11] LEWALSKI, Barbara. *Writing Women in Jacobean England*, 1991, p.2
[12] Idem p. 6.
[13] Ibidem, p. 6.

failure, Charles I was having financial issues, which promoted an ongoing tension with the Parliament concerning money. The main reason for this was that the new King, as his father, did not want to explain to the parliamentarians, who were supposed to be the ones in charge of the finances, neither his foreign policy nor its higher costs. In other words, the Parliament did not approve the vague proposal that was presented by the King in order to justify the war against Spain. Therefore, they did neither concede money nor show support to the cause. Along with that, another disagreement between the King and the parliamentarians happened because Charles decided to raise the taxes. Whereas the Parliament did not consider the usage of the money collected to be well distributed, which means the King only took advantage of that to guarantee his extravagances.

Additionally to the conflicts with Parliament, Charles favored a High Anglican form of worship. However, his wife, Henrietta Maria of France, was Catholic. Considering that England went through a complex period concerning the religious changes that happened during this century, it can be concluded that the Puritans were not exactly satisfied with such an important figure, as the Queen, being devoted to Catholicism. This circumstance, along with the other disagreements previously mentioned, was the trigger that seemed to lead to Charles dissolving the Parliament three times among the years of 1625-1629. After that, in 1629, the King decided to dismiss the Parliament and rule on his own, which generated great discontent, making Charles I even more unpopular. During this period, as was already expected regarding the tentious atmosphere of religion, there was a clampdown on both Puritans and Catholics. Consequently, most of these people opt to emigrate to the American colonies as a way to have religious freedom and escape persecution.

The King managed to rule alone from 1629 to 1641, a period that is called “Personal Rule” or “Eleven years' Tyranny”. Nevertheless, in 1641, Charles I started to face great unrest in Scotland on account of his decision to establish a new prayer book. Faced with that, Charles I was forced to end his “Personal Rule” and call a new Parliament, after all, he needed financial funds to fight against the Scots.

In November 1641, there was an uprising against the King in Ireland, and this led to a further disagreement between Charles I, the Parliament, and the common citizens. The main issue was the incapacity to get in consensus about who would be in charge of the army in the referred rebellion in Ireland. As a consequence, in

August 1642, King Chalres tried to arrest five members of his Parliament, which resulted in the beginning of the Civil War that placed on one side the Royal supporters, and on the other side the Parliamentarians. Although at the beginning the Royalists could achieve some victories in the battles, they were finally defeated between 1645-1646 due to both the parliament's alliance with the Scots, and also the establishment of a New Model Army. Within this context, in 1647 King Charles surrendered to the Scots who sent him to the English Parliament.

However, during this moment, the royal family attempted to escape to the Isle of Wight and, therefore, the Scots decided to re-start the conflict, which led to the Second Civil War. This conflict only lasted for one year, because the Parliamentarian general, Oliver Cromwell, was capable of, once more, defeating the already weakened Royalists. At the end of the War, it was decided that, in order to achieve peace, it was necessary for the King to no longer live. Hence, the radicalist members of Parliament, including Oliver Cromwell, agreed to put Charles I on trial, in the High Court of Justice at Westminster Hall, under the accusation of treason. The final jury found the King guilty and, thus, he was executed outside the Banqueting House on Whitehall, London, in 1649.

On account of the turbulent reign of Charles I, theater became less of a priority than it was seen in the previous rules, although the King supported and promoted performances at his court. Indeed, his wife, Henrietta Maria, who not only patronized the writers but often participated in the masques, was a huge admirer of theater. However, it is important to mention that the Puritans did not see her attitudes as moral and, hence, she was deeply criticized. For example, in 1632, William Prayne, a fervorous puritan, wrote a book called *Histrio Mastix: The Players Scourge, or, Actors tragaedie* in which he made an argument against the public performances, by claiming that their content could encourage immoral conducts in the audience. He mainly denounced the dance present on the masques as well as the women actresses who were nominated by him as "notorious whores". His harsh judgment was considered to be directly addressed to the Queen. In light of this publication, King Charles condemned William Prayne who lost his ear, as some kind of punishment for the perjury he had written. This is also a paradigmatic example of how censorship worked at the time.

Despite the King's attempts to keep the theater, around 1630, the playhouses were going through a bad phase, which indicated that both the quantity of

performances and the public's attendance were declining. This became worse due to the Civil War, and, within the beginning of the conflict, it was determined that the playhouses should be closed in order to guarantee public order.

The rule of King Charles, specially because of the raise of taxes and the subsequent wars, provided an propitious atmosphere for the support of the Parliamentarians, with a focus on the strong figure of Oliver Cromwell who was nominated the leader of the new government. He was known for having a negative perspective regarding theater and its practices, a belief that was shared by other Puritans who considered the performances to be responsible for stimulating bad behavior, immoral attitudes, and impurity. Thus, Cromwell decided to keep the playhouses closed throughout the eighteen years in which his Puritanical government was in control of England, Scotland, and Ireland.

It is under this context that the Closet Drama became the main theatrical genre, after all, not only did the theaters remain closed but some of them, for instance "The Globe", were also torn down. To put it into words, the government made it impossible for the existence of public performances once they were considered to be a sin. Thus, the only way of having access to this type of entertainment was through reading the plays. Nevertheless, it is known that, among the years in which public performances were not allowed (1642-1660), theatrical drama managed to continue alive on account of both the Closet Drama. Additionally, there were also some secret theatrical performances, which were staged for a small number of people in private houses. This is why it is possible to imagine that some plays from the Closet Drama were intended to be performed and, more than that, they may have been staged for a small audience in the private households.

It was only in 1660, when the monarchy was finally restored in England, after the death of Oliver Cromwell, that Charles II Stewart, the new King, decided to reopen the theaters. This period is known as “The Restoration”, and it is considered to break or at least diminish the influence of the traditional Puritan values, which established high standards of morality, in English society. After this period, the Closet Drama, slowly, became less attractive to people who wanted to enjoy the pleasures and leisure of public performances. Despite these commercial performances becoming possible again, women continued to write Closet Drama, once they were still a facilitator for female authors to write and express their ideas. Furthermore, this genre regained its popularity during Romanticism.

Overall, it can be concluded that England went through a period of flourishing of theater, culture, and arts during the 16th and 17th Century. From Elizabethan to Jacobean period, the monarchs encouraged the production of plays, music, and also promoted public performances. In the early modern stage, both performing and watching plays were activities related to men. Although women could join this space, those who did it were normally looked at with bad eyes from the perspective of society and the gender roles that were established. It is known that theater was seen as a didactical structure, which means that, as any cultural production, the plays conveyed ideas and served as an example of either a good behavior to be reproduced or a bad conduct that needed to be punished. As a result, the audience was invited to reflect about their own attitudes, being motivated to follow the ethical, moral, and religious values. Yet, due to the religious tensions that happened in these centuries in England, Scotland, and Ireland, as well as the conflicts involving the absolutist monarchy and Parliament, theater was closed, during the War. When monarchy could regain its status, the English drama was once again allowed to develop.

In a nutshell, this section intended to briefly go through the historical circumstances and events that took place during the reigns of Elizabeth I, James I and Charles I. This timeframe was chosen because it demonstrates the changes in the political and religious spheres that directly affected women, both in terms of the right to education and with regard to social roles and gender ideology. It also was useful for understanding which situations played a major role for Closet Drama becoming a popular genre, legitimizing and broadening not only the female authors achievements but also their public. Moreover, we emphasized the polarity that separated women according to two opposite instances: those who were subordinate to men and therefore virtuous, and those who challenged this structure. Such a division, nevertheless, was not exactly steady since there seemed to be an ambivalence towards the women's roles and gender ideology, and that generated an unstable line which made it easier for them to try to overthrow the repressive patriarchal system. In other words, the inconsistent system allowed women to penetrate the dialectic boundaries between: public and private; speech and silence; obedience and disobedience. This will become clearer when we actually study the play *The Tragedy of Mariam*. For now, however, we tried to cover the historical background, precisely because "o drama aparece segundo o esquema comum a

todas as teorias pré-historicistas, como realização histórica de uma forma atemporal."[14] In the following subchapter we will take a look at Elizabeth Cary's biography in order to comprehend to which extent she faced and dealt with the social issues of her time, which were already presented in this section.

[14] SZONDI, Peter. *Teoria do Drama Moderno*, 2001, p. 23.

1.1- About Elizabeth Cary:

Although this monograph will later engage on an interpretation based on the New Criticism theory, that is, with a focus on close reading, it was considered important to explain some details regarding the social background, and also specific aspects about Cary's life. Despite being aware that the literary productions should not be interpreted, exclusively, by regarding the author's biography, it is relevant to mention Cary's development as a female writer. In fact,

> Elizabeth Cary is currently recognized as the first English woman to publish a play. Her closet drama, Mariam, was published in 1613 when no previous female- authored play had ever been publicly performed and before the English stage had seen the first female performers. (PAXTON-WILSON, 2018, p.12).

She was the only daughter of Sir Lawrence Tanfield, a lawyer who later became the Lord Chief Baron of the Exchequer, and his wife Elizabeth Symondes. His career had a huge influence on Elizabeth's formation. In her biography, which was written by an anonymous author, probably one of her daughters, it is told an anecdote that elucidates an episode in which Elizabeth witnessed her father in a trial. According to this register, a woman was being accused of witchcraft. Even though she admits being guilty, and is later condemned for committing witchcraft, Elizabeth Cary believed that the woman confessed such actions on account of duress. She, then, suggests a question to her father that would prove the woman was just afraid instead of being indeed guilty. The anecdote gave legitimacy to Cary's hypothesis, and the woman was released. If this is a reliable source, it is still unknown, but many researchers have claimed that Cary's wisdom, while articulating contradictory arguments in her play, came from her early contact with the judicial system. As a matter of fact, in *The Tragedy of Mariam,* we will deal with ambivalent positions towards female speech and whether this is associated with sexual license. While some characters, and even the chorus will, at least initially, advocate for this argument, the events in the play as well as the female characters' lines will indicate an opposite perspective.

Nevertheless, we will also observe that there is fluctuation when it comes to the first idea, which means that even those who defend it, oftentimes, contradict themselves. This oscillation can be comprehended on account of the instability being a feature of the very social core that, based on the different rules and the changes promoted by them, could not find consensus within a common ground that favored or even legitimized one of the views concerning women's roles.

When it comes to her education, scholars have constantly mentioned that Cary, being from a relatively wealthy family, had a strong support from her parents, which guaranteed her to freely flourish her love for reading and writing. By a very young age, Cary started to take French classes with a private instructor, and it is said that it took her five weeks to learn the language fluently. After such an achievement, Elizabeth dedicated herself to learning multiple languages, on her own: Spanish, Latin, Hebrew, and Italian.

By the age of fifteen, her father had already decided whom Elizabeth would marry: Sir Henry Cary, from whom she inherited her last name from, later known as Viscount Falkland. As soon as Elizabeth moved in with her husband, her mother in law prohibited her from reading any type of literature. Elizabeth Cary was a woman, from the elite, that lived during Queen Elizabeth I's rule, and therefore, she could benefit from the changes that happened in that period. For having a female Queen, who was highly educated, elite women were finally in a position that allowed them to be educated. Thus, during that time, there was a breakthrough in women's education.

However, after her death, she was succeeded by King James I, who had a very strong opinion against female education. According to him, women should only be able to read and write their own names, after all, they were circumscribed into the private sphere, and their husbands could take the lead towards the most complex issues. In fact, the King was even contrary to her own daughter's education, by neglecting her access to classical education. For him, allowing women to have self-awareness and knowledge was something dangerous: "To make women learned and foxes tame has the same effect - to make them more cunning."[15] This perspective was in sharp contradiction, and demonstrated a setback in relation to the flourish witnessed during Elizabeth I's reign. In 1603, before King James ascended

[15] TEAGUE, Frances. *Bathsua Makin, Woman of Learning*, 1998, p. 43.

the throne, Anne Bradstreet wrote: "*Let such as say our sex is void of reason./ Know it is slander now but once was treason."*[16] Her statement indicated how women were aware of their potential, and could let it grow during Elizabethan period. It likewise demonstrates that they would not settle to the new impositions done by James I, but instead they would find ways to subvert them.

Analyzing this context, it is comprehensive why Elizabeth Cary, once married, was no longer allowed to read. In face of this circumstance, however, she found herself with much spare time to write, initially, poems. After seven years of marriage, Elizabeth and Henry had their first child, and would go on totalizing eleven kids. In 1622, her husband became Lord Deputy of Ireland, and they both moved to Dublin. Once in this city, Elizabeth started to socialize with a group of Catholics, which, along with the death of her firstborn daughter, seem to be the reason why she later converted.

In 1626, Elizabeth comes back to England and announces, publicly, that she is a catholic, which generates an attempt, from her husband, to divorce. Once completed this process, Henry could prevent her from having any type of contact with her children, something that only changed after his death in 1633. Additionally, during this time, in November 1626, after attending mass with Henrietta Maria, the Queen of England during that period, Elizabeth was banished from court.

According to Elizabeth Cary's daughter, Lucy Cary, poetry was considered for her the most prestigious literary form. Although most of her productions in this genre were lost, some of her plays, such as *The Tragedy of Mariam*, demonstrate her dedication towards the poetic forms. In this specific play, Elizabeth wrote all the lines in iambic pentameter. On account of the presence of multiple rhyme schemes, it can be mooted that the play is constructed by embedding few sonnets.

Alongside this literary piece, Elizabeth also wrote the famous *The History of The Life, Reign, and Death of Edward II*, in 1627. As it is also observed in the *The Tragedy of Mariam*, in which Elizabeth Cary bases her story on a legend, in this second play, Cary seems to appropriate King Edward's story as an analogy to her own time: King Charles' rule, and the conflict with the Parliament, that resulted in the Duke of Buckingham government. Therefore, Cary appears to be aware that it is possible to convey ideas through analogies, and thus, obfuscate a discourse that is

[16] FRASE, Antonia. *The Weaker Vessel*, 1985, p. 122.

critical to the socioeconomic order of that period. Under this scheme, Elizabeth Cary could take advantage of the Closet Drama, which has a political impetus, and question the traditional assumptions about female worth and role in the patriarchal society during the time she lived. In fact

> Cary's play belongs to a group of neoclassical nuances of closet drama that are self-consciously positioned within an elite literary culture. Mariams [shows] the political nuances of closet drama, both in their content and in the manner of their publication, and considers the deliberate sense in which they were presented to a select reading public as the products of a private coterie. (STRAZNICKY, 2004, p. 4).

Finally, after briefly mentioning some relevant aspects of Elizabeth Cary's biography, it is necessary to emphasize that this research agrees with the propositions done by Rolland Barthes. Understanding the author's experiences was useful for comprehending the importance of Elizabeth's social status as a means to guarantee her autonomy to write poems, and plays. It also allowed us to make some assumptions about the quality of the arguments and multiple perspectives that are placed on *The Tragedy of Mariam*. In a final instance, taking a look at her biography could indicate that she was conscious about her writing and the mechanisms that she used to criticize her society, without being censored.

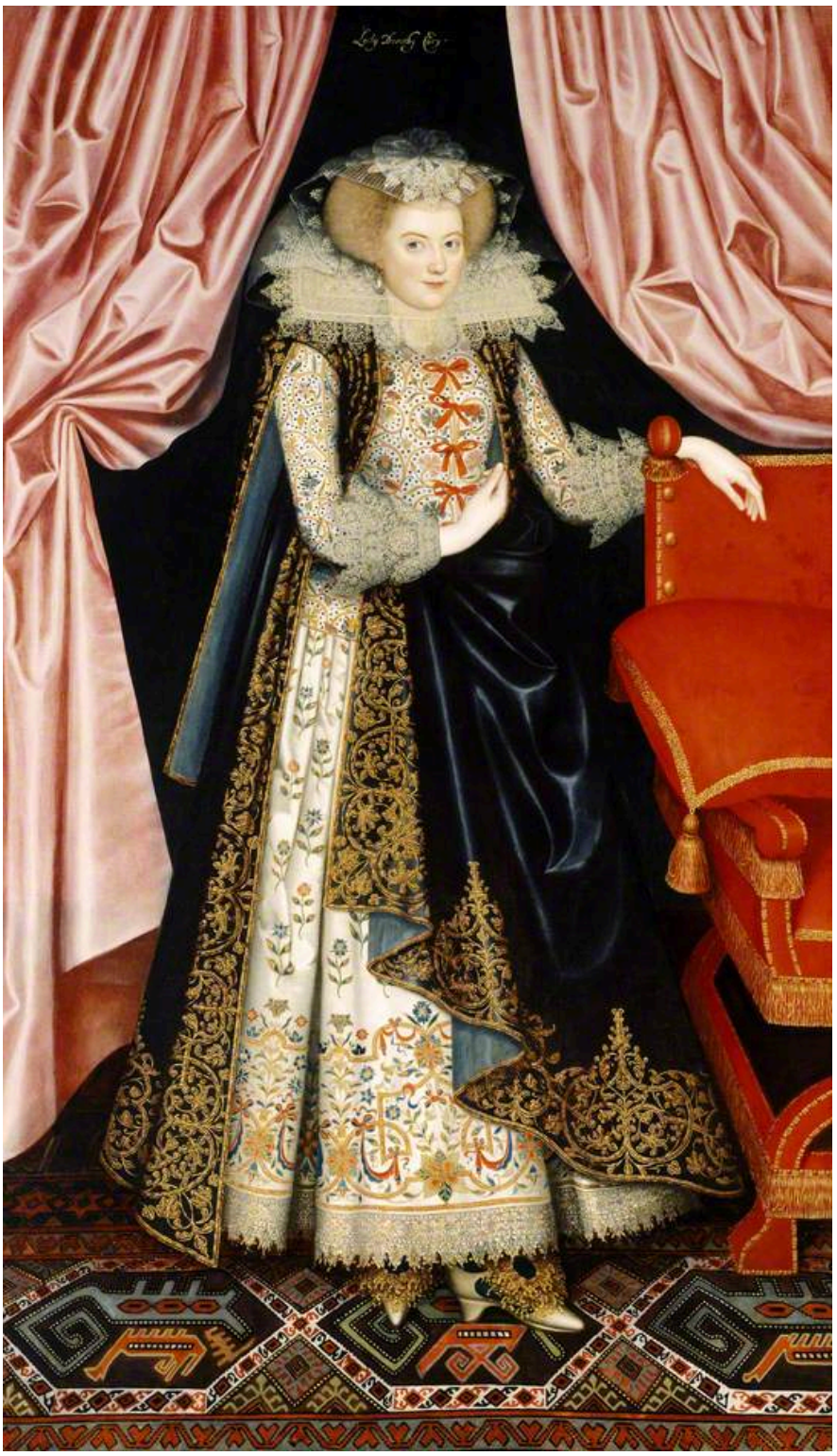
Nevertheless, one caveat must be done. Once again, in agreement with Rolland Barthes, the autobiographical aspect is not enough to propose an interpretation of a literary piece. It would be naive to imagine that only these biographical elements can deal with the complexity of such a play as *The Tragedy of Mariam*. Hence, the subsections 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3 of this monograph will be dedicated to a close reading of specific parts of the play because:

> it is language which speaks, not the author; to write is to prerequisite impersonality (not at all to be confused with the castrating objectivity of the realist novelist), to reach that point where only language acts, 'performs', and not 'me' [...] which is to restore the place of the readers. (BARTHES, 1977, p. 143).

Below we can find an image that is considered to be a portrayal of Elizabeth Cary. This picture was chosen to finish the subchapter about Cary's biography once

it presents the readers with a visual reference of how she might have been. Moreover, the very fact that she had her portrayal done demonstrates that she was an important figure, and member of the English society of the seventeenth century. Finally, in the next chapter, we will depart from this biographical aspect, focusing on the origin of the Closet Drama, as well as emphasizing some relevant information about this genre.

PICTURE 2- PROBABLY ELIZABETH CARY, NÉE TANFIELD (1585-1639), LATER VISCOUNTESS FALKLAND.



WILLIAM LARKE, 1614-1618. SOURCE: https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/probably-elizabeth-cary-nee-tanfield-15851639-later-viscountess-falkland-191791. Retrieved on: 17/04/2024.

2- THE CLOSET DRAMA GENRE

The origin of Closet Drama can be traced back to the philosophical dialogues of the Latin authors, ancient Greek and Roman, at least when it comes to its formal structure. For instance, when analyzed, Plato's Socratic dialogues followed the same pattern as many of the Closet Dramas. In other words, during this philosophical 'conversation' it can be seen the placement of different people, which could be understood, according to literary terms, as characters, who were focused on philosophical rhetoric. Moreover, it is believed that the work of Robert Garnier, a sixteenth century French writer, was the model for the English Closet Dramas. His literary productions, nevertheless, were based on the structure of Seneca's Closet Drama, who also had a huge influence in the development of the tragic genre in England. Seneca himself formulated his writing according to his predecessors, the Greek writers. As a consequence, it can be concluded that the Closet Drama is a genre that is established in a solid and traditional dramatic arrangement, which can be observed, for example, through the presence of one of the most important dramatic elements: the chorus that has a function that operates in the same logic that during ancient times, while representing the common citizens' opinion.

However, the arising of Closet Drama as a formal English theatrical genre happened along the Elizabethan period, which means that those productions were written, simultaneously, to many of Shakespeare's plays. Nevertheless, it is important to mention that the most important moment of the Closet Drama was between 1642 and 1660 when the English Government decided to forbid public performances. During this period of crisis and great unrest, the connection between theater and politics became evident, which seems to be a common feature in history, that is, "unrest and traumatic events as well as the dawning awareness of new possibilities, of the implications of change, will generate innovative and challenging texts."[17] Thus, knowing that female playwrights played a major role in these productions, it can be concluded that their literature was a "hegemonic apparatus"[18] that worked in "significant changes."[19] Although, after these years, with the Restoration and re-opening of the theater, there were fewer plays related to this

[17] BACKSCHEIDER, Paula. *Spectacular Politics: Theatrical Power and Mass Culture in Early Modern England*, 1993, p. 16.
[18] Idem, p. 69.
[19] Ibidem, p. 69.

genre, it is also known that, during the Romantic period in England, many authors decided to come back to this form of writing. Therefore, the Closet Drama worked as an important way in marking the boundaries between literary and theatrical culture as well as defining the entrance of female authors.

According to Marta Strazinsky, the Closet Drama consists of the creation of plays that are not intended to be commercially performed. Nevertheless, they are not only strict to private reading, once they are capable of overcoming this sphere by integrating public circulation through the medium of print. By this token, women were able to address political issues under the insistence that their plays were not going to be staged, which allowed them to sidestep the problem of women's speaking in public as well as the censorship. Consequently, this genre functioned as a vehicle to convey and explore philosophical, political, moral, ethics, and social issues that were all present in the moment in which those literary pieces were written. Accordingly, we can comprehend

> Closet Drama as part of a larger cultural matrix in which closed spaces, select interpretive communities, and political dissent are aligned. This framework also reveals that private space can be constructed as the site of theatrical display, both literally and metaphorically, and that playreading in turn intersects with social and political economies. Most importantly, the crossover between closet and stage, between solitary reading and political engagement, between print and performance reveals the adaptability of privacy to a variety of social, political, and economic agendas. Within such a framework, the “private” nature of women’s closet drama can be analyzed in terms of agency as well as constraint. (STRAZNICK, 2004, p. 4).

As a consequence, it can be mooted that in several levels the closet dramas were not inscribed into a cultural domain that worked, in a strict sense, with the ‘private’ logic. Moreover, such productions could engage not only with political discourse but also contest the system responsible for marginalizing women. Hence, both writing and reading worked as acts of political resistance. Once again, it gets clear how literature and history are intertwined, which means that the plays staged the reality of the seventeenth century society, and placed a critique to that. In other words

> A configuração dos elementos da obra de arte em relação ao seu todo obedece eminentemente a leis que são relacionadas às da sociedade externa a elas. As forças produtivas sociais, assim como as relações de produção, retornam às obras de arte, de acordo com sua mera forma, despojada da sua facticidade, porque o trabalho artístico é trabalho social; são sempre também seus produtos. As forças produtivas nas obras de arte não são em si diferentes das sociais, mas sim apenas por meio de sua ausência constitutiva em relação à sociedade real. (ADORNO, 1970, p. 350-1).

Although quite widespread, the idea mentioned in the last paragraph, and in the quotation above, does not explicitly point out the fact that the reading of the society and its subsequent portrayal is done by a subject. As a result, it always contains layers of personal interpretation, which is also in intertextuality to the social standards. The absolute novelty is that, with the context of Closet Drama, women could finally manage to be the ones expressing their reading of society. To put into other words, female playwrights could both join and add to the public conversation, functioning as a new source and perspective for not only the literary critiques but also the cultural historian. As it is explained by Lewalski, on account of the new trends regarding literary analysis, such as feminist, queer, and cultural studies that were dedicated on "gender and social construction of identities",[20] it is possible to comprehend:

> how early modern society constructed women within several discourses— law, medicine, theology, courtiership, domestic advice". We also know a good deal about how major English poets and dramatists of the period— Shakespeare, Jonson, Donne, Spencer, Milton— dealt with issues of gender and the representation of women in complex literary texts. (LEWALSKI,1993, p.1).

Still taking into account the proposition done by Lewaslki, it can be concluded that studying the productions written by women, during the early modern period, is relevant because it provides us a glimpse of "how early modern Englishwomen read and wrote themselves and their worlds".[21] As this monograph will attempt to indicate, the Closet Drama appears to be the best genre to identify such aspects once it made

[20] LEWALSKI, Barbara. *Writing Women in Jacobean England*, 1993, p. 1.
[21] Idem, p. 1.

it possible for women to write and express their views. The plays demonstrate, for once, the women's voice, and perspectives upon matters such as: "the power of social and cultural institutions, the ideology of absolutism and patriarchy, the formation of subjectivity, the forms of authoritarian self-fashioning, the possibility and manifestations of resistance and subversion".[22]

To put into other words, while in plays written by men the female characters are, mainly, constructed according to a masculine perspective that is, thus, fulfilled with certain ideologies, in plays written by women there is "a shift in the representation of gender, speech, and silence in early modern drama because the continuity between author, actress, and character evokes gender sameness rather than difference".[23] Therefore, there is, within the advent of women's playwrights, the introduction of female-gaze, which means that, at least in the dramatic and literary context, women could not only describe their feelings, views, and critiques towards the patriarchal system, but also invite the readers to reflect upon such matters. Moreover, once in the closet there is no cross-dressing, that is, the presence of male actors portraying female roles, there is "an evasion of the binary choices set up culturally for women's theatrical as well as social roles—either to be represented by men or to be publicly, and therefore shamefully, 'staged".[24]

On the other hand, it is undeniable that only a small portion of women could benefit from this context and advocate for their rights. In other words the Closet Drama is intrinsically associated with a specific social and economic class:

> These writers belong, not incidentally, to the social and political elite of their time, a fact that even further complicated their orchestration of private modes of writing and self-presentation. [...] It is important to acknowledge at the outset that the positive value of privacy in this period is determined by notions of social, political, and economic exclusion. While such notions can of course be exploited by individuals across the social spectrum, in the case of female dramatists they seem to have been particularly class specific: closet drama is fundamentally an elite drama, impossible to dissociate from a cultural literacy that is in no sense part of the public domain. (STRAZNICKY, 2004, p. 5).

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[22] LEWALSKI, Barbara. *Writing Women in Jacobean England*, 1993, p. 2.
[23] HAMAMRA Bilal. "*Tell thou my lord thou saw'st me lose my breath": Silence, speech, and authorial identity in Cary's The Tragedy of Mariam*, 2018, p. 2.
[24] MCGRATH, Lynnette. *Subjectivity and Women's Poetry in Early Modern England: Why on the Ridge Should She Desire to Go?*, 2017, p. 24.

Indeed, Catherine Burroughs appears to call attention to the importance of bearing in mind who is telling the story, by pointing out which autorial subject is speaking on the closet drama. For her “it is often the sound of the human voice that the closet dramatist is hearing when she composes, which is why it is pivotal that we study how closet plays have provided opportunities for disseminating sexual, political, and often unpopular, topical belief”.[25] Accordingly, in her book, Catherine Burroughs defines Closet Drama as follows:

> the traditional closet drama resembles a play script -composed of dialogue, monologues, soliloquies, asides, and stage directions- but it is dominated by a 'literary', 'poetic', and/or 'choric' element conductive to the act of contemplation and intellectual study. (BURROUGHS, 2019, p. 4).

She then continues by explaining that such features demonstrate how this genre pretty much relies on the rhetorical aspect, which means that, contrary to the traditional drama, in these plays “speech-making is the central action”.[26] As a consequence, when it comes to the formal aspects, it can be mooted that the Closet Drama is a play which is sustained by the different types of expressing rhetoric: dialogue, soliloquy, aside, and monologues. Furthermore, since the action is centered on speech and everything needs to be shown through the character's voice, after all, there is no performance or representation of what is being described, every line is full of details.

It is known that the traditional tragedies and comedies did not have very extended monologues or even dialogues because it was necessary to keep the public's attention. Therefore, many parts of the play were embodied by the character's action and representation, rather than by their speech. However, as said previously, this resource was not available for the Closet plays and, therefore, there are many rhetorical moments which are likewise didactic. This perspective leads Burroughs to affirm that “the intentional closet play is primarily a tool for learning, rehearsing, reflection, and re-reading”.[27]

The idea proposed by Catherine in the last paragraph is sustained by the very own environment in which these plays were read, as the name suggests, they were

[25] BURROUGHS, Catherine. *Closet Drama: History, Theory, Form*, 2019, p. 11.
[26] Idem, p. 4.
[27] Ibidem, p. 5.

supposed to be read in private.[28] Thus, it required a solitary ambient, such as the closet. The didactic aspect is something that can be well explored in the context of isolation. To put it into other words, since the play is written and not being performed, the readers can go back to the same line over and over again, while they try to make sense of what is being conveyed. Whereas in theater the experience of watching a performance was delimited by its duration, the closet drama was a singular activity: the readers could dictate the rhythm in which they would like to read the play, as well as the pauses and re-readings they wanted to do. In fact, John Dryden seemed to have accomplished this idea in his preface:

> But there is a vast difference between a public entertainment on the Theatre, and a private reading in the Closet: In the first we are confined to time, and though we talk not by the hour-glass, yet the Watch often drawn out of the pocket, warms the Actors, that the Audience is weary; in the last, every Reader is judge of his own convenience; he can take up the book, and lay it down at his pleasure; and find out those beauties of propriety, in thought and writing, which escaped him in the tumult and hurry of representing. (DRYDEN, 1690, p. 16).

As a result, the Closet Genre, in its own structure, seems to both imply and require a dedication of the reader who will need to read the passages carefully and put some time to not only understand the message but also reflect upon his or her personal views towards what is being stated. The formal characteristics of this genre, which are a result of these productions being designed, primarily, for reading, allowed the replacement of stage action for expository, and oftentimes, lyrical narration that generate multiple arguments. The mix of different features —narration, chorus, lyrics, and some specific dramatic elements— when it comes to writing, worked as a means to mobilize the story within an attempt to, simultaneously, ‘tell’ and ‘show’. Hence, the readers are presented with a structure that departs from what they were used to while watching the performances. It gets clear, then, why the playwrights of this specific genre gave more emphasis to “voice” over “body” and, more importantly, how they suggested a different articulation for these two instances.

[28] Although Catherine Burroughs (2019, p. 5) mentions that, sometimes, the Closet Dramas could be “read out loud in a small group”.

Moreover, it can be assumed that the plays from such a genre will have a formal structure according to its intent:

> Interiority is privileged. Rarely does a closet play contain scenes among more than three characters, since [its] focus is often an argument or a debate, the action being the working out of a physical problem or the advocacy of a moral position and, even in the internal debate the dialogic nature of such an exchange is predominately monologic. [Further], the intellectual appeal and the 'austerity' that Barish identifies in the form (simple plots, for instance, characters that speak at length) result in the dramaturgy's comfort with, indeed a relishing of 'sententiae' — that is, prescriptions for social behavior that moralize and/or advocate. These didactic moments function like the choral passages in Greek drama— when the action is summarized, reflected upon, and offered as a 'product' for intellectual and spiritual consumption— and which also lend themselves to memorization and quotation. (BURROUGHS, 2019, p. 5).

In this regard, it can be concluded that such aspects worked as means to articulate and convey different perspectives upon a specific matter, providing the readers with complex and ambiguous points of view. In other words, the dialogical constitution of this genre allowed the exposition, through the character's voice, of different dilemmas which could either represent a moral conduct in relation to what was expected by society in that period or also advocate for a different perspective. As a result, the public was invested to critically analyze these positions, reflecting about such aspects in order to formulate their own view. Therefore, it can be comprehended the importance of Closet Drama, after all, this genre made it possible for the female writers to expose political, social, and sexual beliefs, mainly, questioning the binary opposition regarding speech and silence. Accordingly, it can be observed how writing became a tool for engaging in both political and public discourse and, consequently, playreading became likewise a political work. As a matter of fact, this is enlarged during the Civil War, within the prohibition of public performances:

> the published play, although it issues from a private moment of composition and is usually read in the solitude of one's closet, is constructed as surreptitious participation in the prohibited activity of theatergoing, thus doubling as political resistance. (STRAZNICK, 2004, p. 359).

In England, the presence of Closet Drama is traced back, to the moment in which Lady Jane Lumley translated *Iphegenia at Aulis*, which was originally written in Greek, to English. This is believed to be the first English closet play, and it was followed by the productions of Mary Sidney and the Pembroke Circle, responsible for inaugurating the initial major period of Closet Drama in England, around 1590. It is however, in 1613, that we have the publication of *The Tragedy of Mariam*, which was the first closed play written by a woman: Elizabeth Cary. This represents a major change in society because, with this achievement, women were slowly capable of integrating the public sphere as well as expressing their own perspectives, something that was not allowed. Nevertheless, there is evidence that Elizabeth had contact with the Sidney's production, being, therefore, also influenced by them. Indeed, the very *The Tragedy of Mariam* has elements that resonate with the "dramatic mode of Sidney's writers",[29] that is, "its extended monologic speeches, its emphasis on verbal rather than physical action, its choral commentaries, and the sententious quality of its thoughts are all hallmarks of Sidnean closet dramas".[30]

The presence of female writers in this genre underpins its dichotomic structure, after all, according to the ideal of that time, women were expected to be chaste, silent, and obedient. The *status quo* inscribed them as marginal to both political and social participation. As a result, female speech and/or writing within the public domain was deemed illegitimate. However, because of the structure of close drama, women were able to achieve agency and subvert not only this restriction but also put into question the association between women's speech and sexuality. There was, then, a rebellion through language. Additionally, there are many other ambivalences that can be observed in the structure of closet plays, which was a necessary feature for helping women to circumvent the repressive patriarchal ideology, the gender construction, and also the censorship:

> in appearance these plays resemble stage plays but were never professionally performed, they are products of aristocratic leisure but are permeated with the traditions of commercial drama, they are charged with political purpose but their reception has no apparent bearing on the exercise of power. (STRAZNICKY, 2004, p. 1).

[29] STRAZNICKY, Marta. *Privacy, Playreading, and Women's Closet Drama, 1550-1770*, 2004, p. 49.
[30] Idem, p. 49.

In fact, as it is also explained by Straznicky, the internal ambivalence of this genre is a consequence of the dichotomy between private and public spheres, which were believed to be two opposed poles. However, as this genre illustrates both by its formal constitution and in its theme, the division of these spaces was not as stable as it seemed. As a consequence, it could be argued that there was, in the 16th and 17th century society of England, a dialectical movement between private and public. Indeed, the Closet plays seem to operate in the intersection and/or interface between those spaces, after all

> a play not intended for commercial performance can, nevertheless, cross between private playreading and the public sphere through the medium of print; a woman writer can use the elite genre of closet drama to engage in political discourse without exposing her views to an indiscriminate public; current political issues can be given dramatic treatment within the confines of a private household; a woman can avoid public censure by insisting that her play not be staged while also issuing it print. (STRAZNICKY, 2004, p. 1).

Moreover, besides the printing, there is also evidence that some of the plays were, somehow, performed, even if for a private and small audience. One of the hints that underpin this idea is the fact that many female writers still used stage directions, which were not necessarily if considered that their plays were not intended to be performed. In this sense, the spread of their ideals could be expanded. The presence of stage directions, as it can be observed in *The Tragedy of Mariam*, written by Elizabeth Cary, indicates that these women had in mind that these productions could be performed:

> there are enough indications of stage business to bring about a similar crossover between literary response and theatrical imagination: there are elaborated entries (such as “Enter Herod and his attendants.”, sig. E4), designated mid-scene entrances and exits (e.g., sigs. F3v, E30, and an unprecedented – for closet drama – indicative direction in “they fight” (sig. D3v). This typographic layering of the literary and performative in Mariam is particularly striking in the opening Act 4, scene 4, where a cup of wine is brought to Herod (sig. F2v). This is one of the play’s most theatrical moments, requiring that the reader imagine the goblet as a physical stage

> property. A tense exchange has just occurred between Herod and Marriam, where both have stubbornly held their ground, he demanding affection, and she refusing to mask her aversion towards him. (STRAZNICKY, 2004, p. 60).

As a result, it can be concluded that the Closet Drama is a genre that is placed in between the dichotomic spaces of "private and public modes of reception",[31] and such alteration was conducted by the female authors which were aware of their sociohistorical context. Accordingly, Marta Straznicky along with other scholars have questioned whether the term 'Closet', and 'private' were really appropriate for elucidating the features of this genre. On the one hand, it is undeniable that, although the female authors were, apparently, conscious about their power of subverting the order by writing closet dramas, the censorship could not apprehend how thin the boundary was between private and social. In other words:

> the private household in which a play may be read is also the locus of social and political networks, the medium of print is both more and less public than commercial performance, and manipulations of print and manuscript format enable the woman writer to address that is selectively public or private [...]. Women's closet plays were explicitly engaged with contemporary political and philosophical debates. By extension, the domestic contexts in which early modern women's play were written and read have themselves been reevaluated as sites of official activity rather than withdrawal or solitary retreat. (STRAZNICKY, 2004, p. 1)

Nevertheless, the main reason for the growing popularity of this genre was the historical conjecture of the English Civil War, when there was the closing of all public theaters. There was, moreover, the continuation of this prohibition, after the end of the war during the "British Interregnum", since the Puritans were the ones in charge of the government. As mentioned before, Puritans had an antitheatrical approach, mainly, for considering the performances as problematic for the moral rectitude, which means that they believed the audience would be corrupted. The conjecture of the war made some contemporary critics not consider the Closet Drama as a theatrical genre but only as a historical anomaly which could not really be understood as theater. Additionally, in an attempt to call attention to such writers and their productions, many contemporary literary critics have emphasized their historical

[31] STRAZINICKY, Marta. *Privacy, Playreading, and Women's Closet Drama*, 2004, p. 1.

importance not regarding the literary significance of them. Indeed, Elizabeth Cary herself seemed to be victim of this process

> Elizabeth Carey's literature has suffered much as a result of being both exemplary and of historical significance. She is a writer who has, as a result of the renewed interest in her work, been constantly subjected to a critical attitude which sees her as an historical phenomenon and thereby overshadows the value of her texts themselves. (WRIGHT, 1994, p. 14).

Although, as it is argued by Matthews, "the closet drama is quite a legitimate product of literary art and the playhouses have no monopoly of the dramatic form"[32], there is undoubtedly an attempt to diminish or even disregard the closet drama. This seems to be a consequence of this genre being, mainly, promoted by female playwrights. In fact, “for much of the twentieth century these plays were considered a failed experiment in dramatic writing, a misguided attempt, (...) to reroute English drama in the direction of French neoclassicism.”[33] However, this argument has been frequently discredited by feminist scholars, and we agree with them, by claiming that such productions are fulfilled with critical and historical matters. As a result, the critics' tendency to act disdainful towards these plays is more a consequence of the patriarchal ideology, which continues to endorse the idea of women’s free speech as a source of male anxiety once it generates a lack of male control. This places a difficulty for instate female writers from the Renaissance into the literary canon, mainly, when it comes to two aspects. First, it is practically impossible to incorporate these productions as canonical texts if they are barely known, read, or spread, which is a consequence, again, of our society privileging male authors. Secondly, many of these literary works contain political, social, and gender critiques, making it harder for their acceptance, since the patriarchal structure always attempts to contain it. Indeed, not only the closet drama plays but also other written productions elaborated by women have demonstrated resistance against patriarchal oppression, which may allow us to consider them as proto-feminist.

Thus, once these productions have been “long neglected by historians of drama”,[34] this monograph will attempt to give the deserved attention to it,

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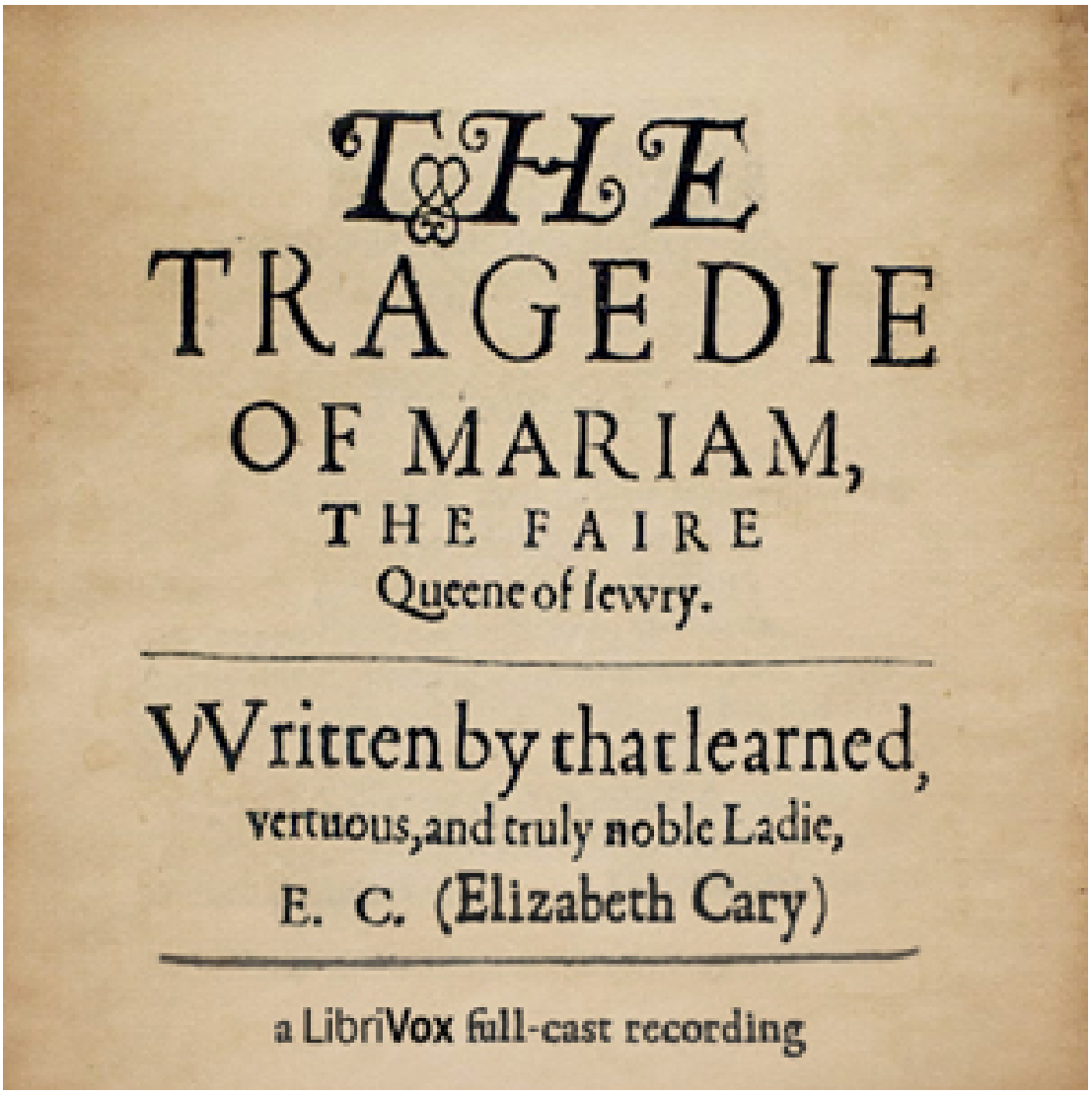
[32] BURROUGHS, Catherine. *Closet Drama: History, Theory, Form*, 2019, p. 47.
[33] STRAZNICKY, Marta. *Privacy, Playreading, and Women Closet Drama, 1500-1700,* 2004, p. 49.
[34] HARBAGE, Alfred. *Cavalier Drama: An historical and critical Supplement to the Study of the Elizabethan and Restoration Stage*, 1964, p. 215.

understanding that there is “always the chance of discoveries”.[35] It is undeniable that the closet plays did become more prestigious because of the circumstances of public performance prohibition. Still and all, it is important to have in mind that this genre did exist before this event and, moreover, it was once again famous during Romanticism. It is by considering the tendency to illegitimate this genre as well as the lack of study concerning the closet drama that this thesis had tried to call attention to some aspects, such as, the structure of the Closet Drama, its importance for female authorship, and for women conveying their ideas, while representing and criticizing their society. Finally, after briefly introducing some major aspects of this genre, it is time to draw our attention, specifically, to the analysis of *The Tragedy of Mariam*, in the next section.

[35] HARBAGE, Alfred. *Cavalier Drama: An historical and critical Supplement to the Study of the Elizabethan and Restoration Stage*, 1964, p. 215.

3- THE TRAGEDY OF MARIAM

PICTURE 3- The Tragedie of Mariam, Manuscript.



SOURCE:https://librivox.org/the-tragedy-of-mariam-by-elizabeth-cary/. Retrieved on: 17/03/2024.

The Tragedy of Mariam is considered to be the first play, and Closet Drama, written and published by a woman in England, during the early modern stage. Research shows that Elizabeth Cary probably wrote *The Tragedy of Mariam* around the years of 1602 and 1604, but the play was only published in 1613, during King James I rule. Even though evidence indicates that she may have written a previous

play, unfortunately, it did not survive along the time, which means that there is no manuscript to prove this theory. On account of being a Jacobean Closet Drama, it is believed that this play was never staged during this period. However, because of the Feminist Criticism, ever since the 20th Century, this play started to receive more attention not only due to its writer being a woman but also because of the causes the female character's advocate for during the plot. As a consequence, modern and contemporary studies of this play have, recently, been produced and some theater companies have likewise staged the performances of *The Tragedy of Mariam*, for instance: Studio Theatre (1994), the King's Head Theatre (2007), and the Tristan Bates Theatre more recently in 2013. This demonstrates, on one hand, how this production could be theatricalized, a claim that was previously done by some researchers:

> This conjunction of theatrical and literary effect produced by the typographic arrangement of Mariam suggests that the play is “private” in a unique sense: its format resembles the most classical of the closet drama, but its accommodation of stage business links it equally with some of the elite dramatic publications emanating from the “private” theater. (...) Citing such qualities as multiple plotting, the direct representation of verbal and physical altercation, and a strongly visual language, Barish suggested what performances critics have since confirmed, that Mariam is thoroughly stageable. (STRAZNICKY, 2004, p. 59).

Although there are some recent publications regarding this play, it is necessary to emphasize that such studies have not been enough to displace *Mariam* from its marginalization in relation to the productions of the early modern period. To put into perspective, it is known that, despite its significance for female writing, and thus, for women to achieve a participation in literature and cultural production, the play is not considered as part of the canon. In fact, the recent study published in 2014 for the famous scholar Jeremy Lopez, *Constructing the Canon of Early Modern Drama*, fails to even acknowledge T*he Tragedy of Mariam* as part of this ‘list’.

The absence of *The Tragedy of Mariam*, or any other play written by women during that period, indicates the popular and widespread notion that early modern Drama was only formed by male-authors, and consequently, a masculine approach of society. It is under this tradition that many scholars have proposed the division and

the study of the literary productions of this time by the useful, yet simple and excluding, classification: Shakespearean and Non-Shakespearean plays. As a result, Elizabeth Cary is, often, disregarded as “Shakespeare’s contemporary”,[36] which also undermines her importance as a writer both during her own period and at contemporaneity.

The more recent studies, however, have been trying to give Elizabeth Cary the proper treatment, by emphasizing her recognition during the time in which she was a writer. These scholars mention, for example, the different literary pieces that referred, somehow, to her authority:

> In addition to Richard Bellings’s 1624 preface to the countess of Pembroke’s Arcadia, in which he thanks Cary, his ‘patronesse’, for her ‘many favours’, the printer of the 1633 edition of the dramatic works of Marston dedicated the book to her (William Sheares’s note, which specifies how ‘your Honour is well acquainted with the Muses’, confirms Cary’s attachment to metropolitan theatrical culture). (WRAY, 2015, p.150).

Furthermore, while claiming for her position as part of the literary canon of the early modern stage, the new studies also elucidate how well acquainted Elizabeth Cary was with the tradition of that time. That is, she was in intertextuality with other writers —Marlowe, Shakespeare, and the Sidney’s circle, for instance—, which demonstrates not only an awareness of such techniques but also a sensibility towards the dramatic features. The very own play *The Tragedy of Mariam* is, somehow, an adaptation and appropriation of a passage from the Old Testament which tells the story of Josephus's Herod and Mariam.

The new studies related to *The Tragedy of Mariam*, thus, based on a Historicist, Materialist, and Feminist criticism have, recently, attempted to give Elizabeth Cary the prominence she deserved. Departing from the early modern stage views, which intentionally related female authorship and free speech to sexual looseness, they seek to emphasize the relevance of these productions. This monograph intends to join this perspective, giving Elizabeth Cary the chance, although anachronically, to live the benefits male authors could freely achieve in

[36] WRAY, Ramona. *Performing The Tragedy of Mariam and Constructing Stage Histor*y, 2015, p.150.

Renaissance. For “if women had a Renaissance, it was a problematic one, fraught with prohibitions.”[37]

For this purpose, it is necessary to briefly explain the plot of *The Tragedy of Mariam*, which is divided into five acts. The play is one of the versions, from the early modern period, of the legend of Herod the Great, the King of Palestine from 39-4 BC, to whom Mariam, the main character that gives name to the play, was married to. In light of this, all the events subdued in the plot happened in 29 B.C, in Jerusalem. Before the play starts, Herod has left for Rome, now commanded by Octavius Caesar, because he was requested to answer for his previous association with Mark Anthony. Additionally, Herod was also being accused of murdering two men who were the rightful heirs of the Jewish throne, and were supposed to be Kings before him. During Herod's absence, and mainly on account of his vulnerable situation regarding the now ruler of Rome, a rumor that Octavius Caesar had ordered the death of King Herod reached Jerusalem. Within this news, the court and the family of Herod takes advantage of the situation to engage in nefarious acts, and also some illicit love affairs, which would be deeply condemned by the King.

At the very beginning of the play, the readers are introduced to Mariam's soliloquy which demonstrates her doubts concerning her feelings for her dead husband. She has an inner conflict since she, simultaneously, loves and despises Herod, which means she does not know how she feels in relation to his supposed death. This is increased by the reveal, done by Sohemus, Herod’s concealer, that the King had left orders to kill Mariam in case of his death, once he did not want any other man to have her. However, Alexandra, Mariam’s mother, interferes with her daughter’s confusion, by declaring that she should be delighted with this news, since she believed Herod would, eventually, find a reason to murder Mariam, such as: renew his love for Doris, his previous wife; or desire her son — Antipater— to be the new King. As the reader will later discover, Alexandra was aware of the fact that Herod was indeed responsible for murder two men, being them, respectively, Alexandra’s father and her son. Consequently, Herod was in charge of and guilty for killing members of Mariam’s family, which explains why Alexandra has a negative vision of the King.

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[37]JONES, Ann Rosalind. *The Currency of Eros: Women’s Love Lyric in Europe, 1540-1620*, 1990, p. 14.

The conversation between mother and daughter is interrupted by the arrival of Salome, Herod's sister. She criticizes Mariam's lack of sadness and suggests that a dutiful wife would be mourning the death of her beloved husband. Intrigued by the dialogue between Mariam and Alexandra, Salome accuses both women of plotting against her, which leads to an argument between her and Mariam. On account of the minority of Mariam's son, both the Queen and her mother, Alexandra, were currently in charge of Jerusalem. During the argument between Salome and Mariam, the Queen mentions that Salome will never ascend to the throne.

Once alone, Salome, seeking revenge, starts to evaluate what she can use against her enemies: Mariam, Constabarus —her husband—, and Sohemus —Herod's counselor/officer—. She engages in a conversation with her beloved, Silleus, and is caught by her husband who tries to demonstrate his love for Salome and win her back. The woman, however, explicitly states her desire to divorce from Constabarus.

While it was believed Herod was dead, the characters could freely act upon their wish: his brother, Pheroras, marries Graphina, a woman from lower class; Constabarus allows the sons of Heord's enemy, Babas, to come back to Jerusalem; Herod's first wife, Doris, and her son, Antipater, claim for the boy's right of becoming the new King; Silleus, Salome's lover, challenges Constabarus to a duel, and gets tremendously hurt; and Salome gets divorce, which was scandalous for women in Judea.

However, news from the High Priest Anannel confirms that King Herod is alive and coming back to Jerusalem. Acquainted with this announcement, Salome, who was condemning Pheroras for his marriage, realizes she can take advantage of Herod's return to, finally, plot against her enemies. She promises Pheroras she will help him keep his wife Graphina, as long as he tells Herod that Constabarus was responsible for bringing back, and also protecting Babas' sons.

When Herod is once again home, he immediately calls for his wife, Mariam, who had already been informed about his return once Sohemus spread the news. The Queen, however, was no longer in doubt about her feelings, and she had decided to confront her husband about the death of both her grandfather and brother, instead of pretending to be happy with his arrival. In the meantime, while Herod was waiting for Mariam to appear, he met Pheroras and was about to interrogate him for his marriage, but the brother interrupted Herod by announcing

that Constabarus had concealed fugitives. Herod, infuriated, ordered the execution of him and the sons of Babas.

Mariam finally meets Herod, and he gets frustrated when he realizes his wife seems unhappy with his return. The Queen questions her husband about the death of her family members, and though he tries to give her a legitimate reason for that, Mariam refuses to believe him. She leaves Herod alone, and Salome's plot starts to take place. She had asked Mariam's servant to give Herod a cup of poisoned wine, proclaiming that Mariam was the one who ordered it. The King, confused with the story, confronted the butler, who explained that Mariam had prepared this wine after Sohemus told her that he was supposed to murder her if Herod was indeed dead. Feeling betrayed by his counselor, and assuming that he was having an affair with his wife, the King ordered the execution of both Sohemus and Mariam.

Despite being innocent, Mariam choses to not argue in favor of her innocence and accepts the punishment. Herod, however, starts to feel remorse. Similarly, the butler, knowing that Sohemus was dead, and that Mariam was the next to be condemned, feels guilty and commits suicide. Although Herod has mixed feelings about whether or not Mariam should be spared of the execution, at the end, Salome manages to convince him, and the Queen is beheaded. While waiting for her death, Mariam receives the visit of Doris, the former wife of Herod, who insinuates Mariam's children will have the same fate as their mom. Only then, Mariam seems to show some regret towards not trying to explain to Herod that she was, in fact, not guilty.

As Salome's plot triumphs, the King is still insecure about his decision, but Nuntio, the messenger, indicates that it is now too late, Mariam is already dead. Herod, initially, can not believe his own actions, and tries to deny what happened. The messenger provides the King with a detailed description of his beloved noble death, and Herod becomes, once again, persuaded by her innocence and purity, leading him to a downward spiral of grief and remorse.

In view of the summary of the plot, it can be observed how the play will deal with themes that, nowadays, would be associated with the feminist fight for women's right: sex, marriage, divorce, and the desire to freely express their wills. All these subjects happened in the context of the tyrannus rule of Herod who is the King of a Jewish society, which means that there is a religious environment that needs to be taken into account.

Additionally, it should likewise be mentioned that Elizabeth Cary is using a past and distant time to expose problems that were present in her own society. Therefore, it can be observed that the author was able to disguise and mask the sixteenth/seventeenth century reality in an ancient historical moment. This was very wise, if not necessary, after all, there was still censorship, which means that even if the plays were not meant to be performed, they could not convey any ideas that were considered problematic for the period. Indeed, the play demonstrates clearly something that is also true for the closet drama as a genre itself: “a culture does not worry as much about audience corruption if ensured that women remember their place”.[38] In other words, as long as it was not noticeable, the female writers could reflect, criticize and, consequently, argue for a different role and place for women in society.

In fact, *The Tragedy of Mariam*, for being a closet drama written by a woman, places a sharp alteration in the portrayal of reality: in this play, even though there are male characters, their voice is no longer represented by a men, but for a female writer who is responsible for constructing their rhetoric discourses. As a result, throughout the play, regardless of who is speaking, there is always the implicit voice of a woman, Elizabeth Cary. In a way, then, it can be likewise noted a change in the construction and representation of gender since the continuum between a female writer who gives voice to a female character guarantees the actual realization of female voice, even if it can never be listened out loud in a theater.

Whereas in the traditional performances the restricted amount of female characters lines was, mainly, a consequence of the fact that boys represented women, since their voices were not exactly capable of creating a plausible resemblance from the real speech of a woman, in the Closet Drama this was no longer an issue. Additionally, even if there were moments in which the boys performed and spoke, while representing the women’s roles, “their voices are always haunted by the possibility of ‘breaking’ into a male register”,[39] indicating that behind that female speech there is actually a male representation. On the other hand, once in the closet drama there is not an intention for performance, female characters were

[38] BURROUGHS, Catherine. *Closet Drama: History, Theory, Form*, 2019, p. 57.
[39] BLOOM, Gina. V*oice in Motion: Staging Gender, Shaping Sound in Early Modern England,* 2007, p. 18.

allowed to take part in long monologues, soliloquies, asides, and dialogues, which means their voice was, somehow, placed in the plays. This idea is increased on account of the continuum mentioned previously which indicates gender sameness, and a coherent representation.

Bearing in mind that the plays functioned as a mirror of the society, it can be understood that the lack of participation of women in the performances was a direct consequence of the female constriction to the private space. Furthermore, the minimal and almost insignificant presence of female voices in the theater indicates that while men could freely speak, women should be silenced, which is not only a result of the division between private and public sphere but also a consequence of women's verbal dexterity being understood as responsible for male's tragedy and downfall. Therefore, by giving women the right of speaking their mind, Elizabeth Cary is able to problematize the traditional ideas regarding gender construction and its association with speech, and/or silence. To put into other words, she undermines the traditional ideology, associated with the patriarchal and misogynist standards, that determined a binary opposition which guaranteed to men the right of speech and to women the obligation of chastity, silence, and obedience.

The Tragedy of Mariam places five main female characters: the opposed pair Mariam, and Salome; Alexandra; Doris; and Graphina. While it is evident that the first four women are able to express their minds, and break the constriction of silence, the last character only has one speech throughout the play. This could be seen as some sort of contradiction, or even be justified as an account of Graphina being part of a lower social class. In this monograph, however, we will argue two main points in relation to this female character, which will be further developed in the following sections: i- there is a difference between being silent and being silenced; ii- the etymology of this word comes from the latin 'graphein' which means 'to write', and that allows us to interpret this character as a reference to Elizabeth Cary's function as the author.

On the other hand, all the male characters have lines. The problematization done by Cary seems to be in relation to what extent these characters make good use of speech. Whereas Mariam, actively, chooses to stay silent and faces her unfair fate, Herod, Pheroras, Constabarus, Silleus, Antipater, and even Sohemus take advantage of their lines in order to deceive, plot, and achieve authority. There is, then, an opposition between what speech and silence convey in the play, which

means that, once again, Elizabeth Cary is questioning the traditional standard towards these aspects. Similarly, there seems to be also a problematization concerning the use of speech for men and women. Whether or not the female characters who are outspoken are portrayed as heroines or villains, one truth it is undeniable: they are, constantly, attacking each other, instead of joining forces to win over the violent male-dominated context they live in. Indeed, while Alexandra seems to be the only one who, explicitly, criticizes Herod and his authoritarian as well as illegitimate rule, the rest of the women can neither agree nor live in sorority. Thus, although

> Alexandra's assertion that Herod does not have a direct blood claim to the throne (1.2.6–12) demonstrates the possibility of woman's autonomy in Herod's absence; their destructively competitive voices betray the idea of a common female agenda. (HAMAMRA, 2018, p. 3).

In this regard, Cary "demonstrates the mutually destructive potential of female homosocial bonds in the face of masculine oppression",[40] which means that the repressive patriarchal society operates in a way that it guarantees rivalry between women. As a consequence, it can be already observed how the play will contrast two different types of female characters that act in opposite ways: whereas Mariam is in consonance to the social expectations of the period, Salome stands for the contradiction of the values. This is relevant to mention because, as it will become clear during the analysis of the play, these two characters have different endings and, depending on how the play treats them, it can be comprehended whether or not Elizabeth Cary was problematizing the values that sustained her society.

On the one hand, it is undeniable that the play still demonstrates the traditional values, which are depicted by the chorus that represents the popular opinion of society. By the same token, the character Mariam, which can be understood as a martyr, is also in reliance on social patterns. Despite her good conduct throughout the play, Mariam is still punished by her husband Herod, in an event that leads to her death. The main reason for her final ending is the comprehension that Mariam has a transgressive tongue, that is, while engaging in

[40] MILLER, Naomi J. *Changing the Subject: Mary Wroth and Figurations of Gender in Early Modern England*, 1996, p. 367.

public speech, specially with Sohemus, she is considered to be unchaste. Thus, the gender construction based on the binary opposition of speech and silence, which placed women as marginal to the social, political, and public domain, is at the core of the relationships, guiding what happens in the play. As a result, even though the King does suffer the consequences of his actions, it could be questioned whether or not this play has a sense of poetic justice. If one agrees with the standards of that period, then Mariam could be considered a danger to the social organization. Under this light, it could be argued that Cary is defending the traditional patriarchal system, by guaranteeing that the order is reestablished with Mariam's death, leaving the female audience aware of the consequences of feminine mouthing.

On the other hand, her death could be considered as unfair, especially because Salome plotted against her. Indeed, as it will be further discussed, the chorus seems to recognize, at the end of the play, that Mariam did not deserve to be murdered. Additionally, Salome's triumph is another circumstance that undermines the possibility of understanding Mariam's death as filled in with poetic justice. The truth is that "depending on their assumptions about where authorial sympathies lie, critics have variously presented Cary as a misogynist, as proto-feminist, or as ambivalent about women's worth and place in society."[41] Despite these divergences, this monograph will argue that Elizabeth Cary made use of multiple perspectives, which create a complex dialogue that, oftentimes, places together contradictory views, as a way to not only mirror her society that was likewise constructed upon ambivalences, but also to criticize the double standard of the patriarchal society. We aim to show that Mariam is a victim of arbitrary violence, and that even the other female characters, like Salome and Doris, have to appeal to endorsing the repressive male-dominated system, turning their back to other female characters, in order to survive and achieve what they desire. This problematization indicates, moreover, a political attempt to conquer for women a different place in society.

Having briefly explained the plot of this play, and the main hypothesis that will be further elaborated, the next sections will take a look at specific parts of this closet drama, as means to solidify our argument: i- the chorus, and its traditional functions, showing the standard conceptions and views of that period. Alongside this, it will also be examined how Cary uses this resource, and their lines to problematize the

[41] FALK, Viona. *The Chorus in Elizabeth Cary's 'Tragedy of Mariam'*, 1995, p. 3.

patriarchal assumptions regarding both the female role in society and the association between female speech and sexual looseness; ii- an analysis of the construction of female characters, focusing on their speech, and agency; and iii- the possible interpretations that resonate from Graphina who rather than emphasizing the virtuosity and chastity of a silent woman, engages on an illustration of silence as a way of resisting male domination.

3.1- The Chorus in *The Tragedy of Mariam*:

The Tragedy of Mariam is structured in a way that the organization of the chorus is in accordance with the Greek and Latin dramatics conventions. In other words, they represent the view of a specific social and cultural group from King Herod's society: the values of Jews. Therefore, most of the time there is the observation of a patriarchal and traditional discourse. Throughout the play, the chorus will comment, mainly, on Mariam's actions and conduct by either condemning it or expressing some neutral and positive visions. As a result, it can be concluded that, despite being responsible for endorsing and showing the standard perspective of that society, there are some moments of ambivalence, in which the chorus contradict its previous statement. The inconstancy of the chorus is the primer indication that the play is trying to question the male-dominated structure, and the gender constructions based on the binary opposite of speech and silence. In fact, their arguments indicate that Elizabeth Cary is, apparently, making use of a traditional feature from the tragic gender, while also changing and transgressing it.

In other words, it could be argued that Carry seems to, simultaneously, subscribe and interrogate the patriarchal ideology. Accordingly, as stated previously, this appears to be a central feature of closet drama: the exploitation of moral and also political issues that are discussed in the play by the placement of different arguments, allowing an attentive reader to come up with their own perspective upon the matter that is being, somehow, debated. There is why the lines of the characters tend to be long and full of details, functioning as a defense of their point of view. The genre, hence, emphasizes a dialectical process that is focused on political, social, and cultural debate, working as a critical instrument of society and having also a didactic aspect. In fact,

> these didactical moments— when the action is summarized, reflected upon, and offered as a "product" for intellectual and moral development— reveal one of the more fascinating aspects of the genre, [which is]... that the reader is in a solitary setting such as her library, study, or "closet" —historically in the case of women, a site of privacy— and the plays are crafted to encourage a "poring over" of the text in ways obviously impossible in a live theatrical performance. (BURROUGHS, 2019, p. 4).

By reading the play, it can be observed that it puts to their readers a multivocal, and multiperspective dialogue about women, more specifically, when it comes to the association between their speech and sexuality. There is likewise a debate in relation to gender construction, and male authority. The female characters are able to speak their minds, talk freely, and express their opinion. Whether or not those women who manage to subvert the order while actively speaking, and participating in the public sphere are, somehow, punished at the end of the play, will be further analyzed. However, for now it is important to address this undeniable fact: there are conflicting ideas regarding the conception of female role in society, and even the chorus presents to the readers contradictory views about the patriarchal ideology. In this regard, Elizabeth Cary seems to call the readers' attention to the importance of having a critical reading towards the statements done by the Chorus while they prescribe the virtuous conducts for women.

On the one hand, it is perceivable that the Chorus pronounces, several times, censorious critiques of Mariam's behavior, once it departs from the traditional ideal of female subordination. However, this observation seems to have misguided some scholars who assumed that, within these comments, Elizabeth Cary was endorsing and showing support to the patriarchal view of women's inferiority. For instance, Krontiris argues that in the Chorus' third ode there is enough evidence to justify this thesis:

> 'Tis not enough for one that is a wife/ To keep her spotless from an act of ill:/ But from suspicion she should free her life/, And bare herself of power as well as will./ 'Tis not so glorious for her to be free,/ As by her proper self restrained to be./ When she hath spacious ground to walk upon/ Why on the ridge should she desire to go?/ It is no glory to forbear alone only/ Those things that may her honor overthrow./ But 'tis thankworthy if she will not take/ All lawful liberties for honor's sake. That wife her hand against her fame doth rear,/ That more than to her lord alone will give/ A private word to any second ear,/ And though she may with reputation live,/ Yet though most chaste,/ she doth her glory blot,/ And wounds her honor, though she kills it not./ When to their husbands they themselves do bind,/ Do they not wholly give themselves away?/ Or give they but their body, not their mind,/ Reserving that, though best, for others' prey?/ No sure, their thoughts no more can be their own,/ And therefore should to none but one be known./ Then she usurps upon another's right,/ That seeks to be by public language graced:/ And though her thoughts reflect with purest light,/ Her mind if not peculiar is not chaste./ For in a wife it is no worse to find,/ A common

> body than a common mind./ And every mind, though free from thought of ill,/ That out of glory seeks a worth to show, desire of praise/ When any's ears but one therewith they fill,/ Doth in a sort her pureness overthrow./ Now Mariam had (but that to this she bent)/ Been free from fear, as well as innocent./ (*The Tragedy of Mariam,* p. 41, act 3, scene 3, v. 215-250).

For Krontiris, these verses elucidate how "Cary had internalized the patriarchal attitudes and constructs of women."[42] However, resembling the tradition from the Senecan tragedies, the Chorus corresponds to the perspective of a partial group from society rather than an authoritative point of view. In this specific case, as it is stated at the beginning of the play, they are a 'company of Jews', who judge Mariam based on their conservative notion, associated with the moral standing of the patriarchal society. According to them, a woman, and more specifically, a wife has as a duty to subject her mind and body to her husband. In this regard, the Chorus is informing its participation in the traditional values, asserting that "women were conceived as property belonging to men: a wife had no social identity separate from that of her husband."[43] It becomes evident, then, that contrary to some scholars' perception, the chorus does not provide objective comments towards the actions. On the other hand, they elucidate one perspective that is, actually, completely attached to the materiality in which they are subscribed.

Regarding the traditional Senecan play *Medeia,* it can be observed how the chorus functions as a cultural group that argues in defense of its own self-interest. They are described as Corinthian citizens who do not sympathize with Medeia, for considering her a disruptive and problematic figure for the state. Therefore, throughout the play, there is the constant reinforcement of this perspective with the chorus statements, for instance, by referring to *Medeia* as a "foreigner". Similarly, in the closet drama, which has inherited many characteristics from the Senecan tragedies, this same idea can be noticed. Thus instead of working as a means to express the authorial voice of Elizabeth Cary, the chorus is a dramatic element that indicates, by interpreting the action of the characters, "the attitudes of a cultural group specific to a single time and place."[44]

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[42] KRONTIRIS, Tina. O*ppositional Voices: Women as Writers and Translators of Literature in the English Renaissance*, 1992, p. 88.
[43] FALK, Viona. *The Chorus in Elizabeth Cary's 'Tragedy of Mariam'*, 1995, p. 4.
[44] Idem, p. 6.

In *The Tragedy of Mariam*, the chorus critique towards the main character's actions corresponds to the perception of her as a threat to the *status quo* of the patriarchal society, which was defended by this group of Jews. While Mariam uses free speech to advocate for women's freedom from the restriction of male authority, the chorus needs to censor her, questioning her wicked conduct: outspokenness; excessive pride; sexual conduct; infidelity; immorality; non subjugation of her body and mind to her husband; lack of abstention from public language; and disobedience towards her husband. In other words, during the early modern period, the construction of an ideology about gender roles, guaranteed that women were expected to act upon certain standards. For being virtuous, it was required for a woman to be silent, obedient, chaste, and constrained to the private environment of her house. Hence, the judgments done by the chorus about Mariam's behavior seems to take into account these values, which indicate a preconceived and idealized notion of women.

Nevertheless, it is perceivable that, depending on the ode, the chorus places different and contradictory views when it comes to their judgment of Mariam's moral standing, which also demonstrates their unclear position towards women and their duties. Moreover, such contradictions and ambivalences of the chorus are likewise a consequence of Elizabeth Cary's attempt to scrutinize the inconsistencies regarding the early modern period ideology about women. In order to point this out, we will analyze some specific passages from the play. To start with, the first apparition of the chorus, after the initial act, expresses a condemnation of Mariam's attitude, by interpreting it as her will to replace her husband:

> Still Mariam wished she from her lord were free,/ For expectation of variety:/ Yet now she sees her wishes prosperous be,/ She grieves, because her lord so soon did die./ Who can those vast imaginations feed,/ Where in a property contempt doth breed?/ (*The Tragedy of Mariam*, p. 20, act 1, scene 6, v. 517-522).

Although in the rest of the lines, from this initial ode, there is no clear statement that indicates that the Chorus is referring to Mariam, in the verse "For expectation of variety[...]/ She grieves, because her lord so soon did die",[45] it

[45] *The Tragedy of Mariam*, p. 20, act 1, scene 6, v. 518-520.

becomes evident that they are talking about the Queen. However, if one considered Mariam's soliloquy and her dialogue with her mother, Alexandra, there is no signal that she wished for other men. On the other hand, despite proclaiming that "One object yields both grief and joy",[46] the reason for her disaffection is a consequence of Herod's authoritative and tyrannus' attitude, which led him to murder Mariam's relatives, and also order her death in case he died. Additionally, the Queen later states that she does not intend to replace Herod: "But yet too chaste a scholar was my heart,/ To learn to love another than my lord:/ To leave his love, my lesson's former part,/ I quickly learned, the other I abhorred/".[47] In these lines, Mariam demonstrates that she does not want to get involved with another man, excluding any possible chance of adultery or wicked conduct. Therefore, the interpretation done by the Chorus appears to be not only misguided but also erroneous: Mariam does not either show any sign of infidelity towards her husband or engages in sexual conduct with another man, which demonstrates that she did not wish for variety but only for a decent treatment.

By the same token, since the play offers a mutivoice perspective, the readers are also introduced to Alexandra's comment upon Mariam's conduct. During this moment, the mother is answering to Salome's accusation, which endorses the Chorus' view. Alexandra not only denies that Mariam craved for other men but she also express that, if Mariam is indeed glad because Herod died, this is definitely justified by the way he treated her:

> If she desired another king to have,/ She might before she came in Herod's bed Have had her wish./ More kings than one did crave/ For leave to set a crown upon her head./ I think with more than reason she laments, unreasonably/ That she is freed from such a sad annoy:/ Who is't will weep to part from discontent?/ And if she joy, she did not causeless joy. (*The Tragedy of Mariam*, p. 10, act 1, scene 3, v. 211-218).

Additionally, the play also introduces to the readers Sohemus' view of Mariam. The man, who is the officer of Herod, feels relief when he discovers he will not have to murder the Queen, mainly, because he believed her to be a virtuous and noble woman. Thus, Mariam's allegation of being chaste is confirmed by this other

[46] *The Tragedy of Mariam*, p. 3, act 1, scene 1, v. 10.
[47] *The Tragedy of Mariam*, p. 4, act 1, scene 1, v. 27-30.

character who, contrary to the popular opinion of their period, does not regard outspokenness with sexual license. He, nevertheless, is aware of this traditional association, which means that, although he does not consider her to be guilty, she will be punished for having a public speech: “Poor guiltless queen!/ Oh, that my wish might place/ A little temper now about thy heart: moderation/ Unbridled speech is Mariam’s worst disgrace,/ And will endanger her without desert.”[48] Sohemus’ lines work as a means to prove that, contrary to the chorus’ perspective, the Queen is innocent, and faithful. Yet, as it is also stated by Sohemus, King Herod will share the same view as the chorus, which will lead Mariam to a guiltless and unjustified death.

Furthermore, increasing the incoherence of the chorus’ comment, it is known that such a harsh judgment is done after the first act, in which the readers also accompany both Salome’s soliloquy, and the dialogue between her and Constabarus. During these two moments, Salome states, explicitly, that she does not intend to continue married with her current husband, once she is in love with another man, Silleus.

> He loves, I love; what then can be the cause/ Keeps me [from] being the Arabian’s wife?/ It is the principles of Moses’ laws,/ For Constabarus still remains in life./ If he to me did bear as earnest hate,/ As I to him, for him there were an ease;/ A separating bill might free his fate/ From such a yoke that did so much displease./ Why should such privilege to man be given?/ Or given to them, why barred from women then?/ Are men than we in greater grace with Heaven?/ Or cannot women hate as well as men?/ I’ll be the custom-breaker: and begin/ To show my sex the way to freedom’s door,/ And with an off’ring will I purge my sin/; The law was made for none but who are poor. (*The Tragedy of Mariam*, p. 13, act 1, scene 4, v. 297-312).

The excerpt above indicates that Salome desires to get married with Silleus, which she refers to by saying “Arabian’s wife”.[49] While claiming for their love, Salome criticizes and questions the standard social order: Why are only men allowed to divorce, according to the Deuteronomy 24.2 bill? Why can they decide they no longer love their wives, and then reach for variety? Is there a religious law that guarantees them such a right? And why are women impeded to do the same? Moreover, her speech demonstrates her awareness of the double standard within the

[48] *The Tragedy of Mariam*, p. 40, act 3, scene 3, v. 181-184.
[49] *The Tragedy of Mariam*, p. 13, act 1, scene 4, v. 297.

Mosaic law, which guarantees power and privileges for men that are denied to women. As a result, while challenging this system, Salome concluded that there is no proper justification for this difference, and therefore, she will be the first woman to divorce from her husband, something she emphasizes being possible because of her social status: “The law was made for none but who are poor”[50]. In fact, she points out that her urge for such an emancipation from Constabarus would lead her to plot against him:

> “If Herod had lived, I might to him accuse/ My present lord./ But for the future’s sake/ Then would I tell the king he did refuse/ The sons of Babas in his power to take./ But now I must divorce him from my bed,/ That my Silleus may possess his room./ Had I not begged his life, he had been dead,/ I curse my tongue, the hind’rer of his doom,/ But then my wand’ring heart to him was fast” (*The Tragedy of Mariam*, p. 13, act 1, scene 4, v. 313-321).

As Salome believed Herod was dead, her initial plan to incriminate Constabarus, causing his death, would not be possible. Thus, she advocates for the divorce during her conversation with her then husband. In this dialogue, there is the problematization of outspokenness, and the lack of restriction towards female speech. That happens because Constabarus sees Salome talking in private with Silleus, which is according to him, and the moral standard of the early modern period, a wicked attitude. In this regard, at the beginning of their conversation, Constabarus condemned Salome’s action, by elucidating how a virtuous wife should behave. Additionally, he emphasizes his suspects about her involvement with Silleus, and calls attention to her lack of shame, despite her wrong conduct:

> Oh Salome, how much you wrong your name,/ Your race, your country, and your husband most!/ A stranger’s private conference is shame,/ I blush for you, that have your blushing lost./ Oft have I found, and found you to my grief,/ Consorted with this base Arabian here:/ Heaven knows that you have been my comfort chief,/ Then do not now my greater plague appear./ Now by the stately carve`d edifice/ That on Mount Sion makes so fair a show,/ And by the altar fit for sacrifice,/ I love thee more than thou thyself dost know./ Oft with a silent sorrow have I heard/ How ill Judea’s

[50] *The Tragedy of Mariam*, p. 13, act 1, scene 4, v. 312.

> mouth doth censure thee:/ And did I not thine honor much regard,/ Thou shouldst not be exhorted thus for me./ Didst thou but know the worth of honest fame,/ How much a virtuous woman is esteemed,/ Thou wouldest like hell eschew deserve`d shame,/ And seek to be both chaste and chastely deemed./ Our wisest prince did say, and true he said,/ A virtuous woman crowns her husband's head./ (*The Tragedy of Mariam*, p. 15, act 1, scene 6, v. 375-396).

This speech, however, does not seem to have an effect on Salome, who only feels anger and more motivation to divorce from Constabarus. She claims that she was a good wife, and that her husband was being ungrateful. During her argument, Salome elucidates that she is aware of Constabarus helping Babas' sons, which would be considered a betrayal for Herod. As a result, she expresses that her husband owe her, for she was the only reason he was still alive:

> That thou hadst forfeited to hapless fate,/ To be to such a thankless wretch the wife?/ This hand of mine hath lifted up thy head,/ Which many a day ago had fallen full low,/ Because the sons of Babas are not dead;/ To me thou dost both life and fortune owe./ (*The Tragedy of Mariam*, p. 16, act 1, scene 6, v. 399-404).

Moreover, Salome continues her speech ignoring the request done by Constabarus for her to "dismiss"[51] her "mood".[52] She then clearly declares that she no longer desires to be married to him: "Thou shalt no hour longer call me wife,/ Thy jealousy procures my hate so deep:/ That I from thee do mean to free my life,/ By a divorcing bill before I sleep."[53] Constabarus, however, questions the legitimacy of such a request, by emphasizing the difference between men and women, in the early modern period. There were not only opposite gender roles, but men could also benefit from specific rights that were not available for women, being the divorce one of them. For Constabarus, men and women are not the same, and so if Salome could achieve the right to divorce, then she, and the other female participants of society, should also act upon other matters that are associated with men's duty.

[51] *The Tragedy of Mariam*, p. 16, act 1, scene 6, v. 409.
[52] Idem, p. 16, act 1, scene 6, v. 409.
[53] Ibidem, p. 17, act 1, scene 6, v. 417-420.

Rather than advocating for women's rights, Constabarus uses this argument to ironicise and show his rejection of Salome's attempt to act like a man. In fact, he associates the difference between men and women, which is strictly generated by social conventions, with the laws of nature. As a result, the change of this structure, would be as strange as witnessing the winter being warm, and the summer cold:

> Are Hebrew women now transformed to men?/ Why do you not as well our battles fight,/ And wear our armor?/ Suffer this, and then/ Let all the world be topsy-turve`d turned upside down/ 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: creatures/ For sacred service let us take no rest,/ Use us as Joshua did the Gibonites./ (*The Tragedy of Mariam*, p. 17, act 1, scene 6, v. 421-432).

The shift in the tradition, which cause a major break in the social order, is also reinforced by Constabarus comment: "Till now that fourteen hundred years are past,/ Since first the Law with us hath been in force./ You are the first, and will, I hope, be last,/ That ever sought her husband to divorce."[54] In these lines, Constabarus indicates that Salome was the first woman to seek for divorce, and that although she had previously indicated that she wished her model would be followed by other women, Constabarus expresses his hope that tradition will not change. To this announcement, Salome, once again, elucidates that she will not measure efforts to achieve what she desires. In other words, regardless of the Law, the conservative social order, and the gender roles' opposition, Salome would always act upon her own desire and self-interest: "I mean not to be led by precedent,/ My will shall be to me instead of Law." [55]

Finally, the last outstanding moment from the dialogue between Salome and Constabarus happens when he indicates that this attitude, replacing one man for another, appears to be, somehow, a pattern for Salome. Constabarus expresses that he used to be in Silleus's shoes, while she was engaged with Josephus. In fact, as it is also described in the play, Salome plots against this man, spreading a malicious

[54] *The Tragedy of Mariam*, p. 18, act 1, scene 6, v. 449-. 452.
[55] *The Tragedy of Mariam*, p. 18, act 1, scene 6, v. 453-454.

gossip about him loving Mariam: “Tis true indeed, I did the plots reveal,/ That passed betwixt your favorites and you:/ I meant not, I, a traitor to conceal./ Thus Salome your minion Joseph slew.”[56] Thus, Constabarus concludes that Salome is volatile, and inconsistent, which means she will also not be able to keep her promises to Sillues, and will soon exchange him:

> But if my thoughts aright the cause discuss,/ In winning you, he gains no lasting bliss;/ I was Silleus, and not long ago Josephus then was Constabarus now:/ When you became my friend you proved his foe, lover/ As now for him you break to me your vow. (*The Tragedy of Mariam*, p. 18, act 1, scene 6, v. 459-464).

As a result, by analyzing Salome’s actions, her soliloquy, and the dialogue between her and Constabarus, it can be concluded that she is the one who claims for sexual “variety”.[57] In this regard, many scholars have been suggesting that the critique and judgment done by the chorus was, in fact, erroneously shifted to Mariam, while it states a comment that is associated with Salome’s conduct. In a way, “the ethical implications of Salome’s desire are written rather strangely onto the condition of Mariam”,[58] a woman that does not crave for any man rather than Herod. Despite the previous interpretation being coherent, there is also another hypothesis that could be mentioned. If the chorus, as this monograph has often renewed, presents the values from early modern society, then it could be argued that the critique is wisely placed on Mariam. To put into other words, in the previous analysis of the passages from the play, it was observed that Sohemus, despite believing Mariam to be chaste, is aware that she will be condemned for her outspokenness. Indeed, the chorus assumption of Mariam’s desire for “variety”[59] is a result of her verbal license being associated with sexual impropriety. Thus, contrary to what was indicated by Straznick, the chorus does neither mistake nor confuse Salome’s actions with Mariam’s. As a subjective interpreter of the reality being described in the play, the chorus actively chooses to evaluate Mariam’s free speech according to the moral standards and ideals of the nature of women.

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[56] *The Tragedy of Mariam*, p. 11, act 1, scene 3, v. 247-250.
[57] Idem, p. 20, act 1, scene 6, v. 511.
[58] STRAZNICK, Marta. *Profane Stoical Paradoxes: The Tragedie of Mariam and Sidnean Closet Drama*, 2009, p.127.
[59] *The Tragedy of Mariam*, p. 20, act 1, scene 6, v. 511.

Similarly, considering the plot of *The Tragedy of Mariam*, the same association of outspokenness and sexual behavior is also done by Herod who assumes Mariam is having an affair with Sohemus. Although this suspicion is increased by Salome who plots against Mariam, for Herod his wife engaging in public speech, instead of subjugating her mind to him, is a sign of infidelity. Initially, Herod is reluctant to accept his wife had entrusted her thoughts to another man, Sohemus. He questions Salome whether she is sure about such an accusation, by claiming that Mariam is extremely witty, and would amaze people with her speech. However, during their conversation, Salome manages to convince him:

> Herod: But have you heard her speak?/ Salome: You know I have./ Herod: And were you not amazed?/ Salome: No, not a whit./ Herod: Then 'twas not her you heard; her life I'll save/ For Mariam hath a world-amazing wit./ Salome: She speaks a beauteous language,/ but within Her heart is false as powder: and her tongue cosmetics/ Doth but allure the auditors to sin,/ And is the instrument to do you wrong./ Herod: It may be so: nay, 'tis so; she's unchaste,/ Her mouth will ope to ev'ry stranger's ear:/ Then let the executioner make haste,/ Lest she enchant him, if her words he hear./ Let him be deaf, lest she do him surprise/ That shall to free her spirit be assigned." (*The Tragedy of Mariam*, p. 56-57, act 4, scene 7, v. 424-437).

The main argument provided by Salome is that Mariam manages to disguise herself, although "beauteous"[60] and wit when with Herod, she can also speak an improper language. This seems to be enough to convince the King that Mariam has indeed been unfaithful to him, which implies that she is no longer chaste or virtuous. Additionally, he concludes that she is also non-reliable, after all, "her mouth will ope to ev'ry stranger's ear".[61] This sentence asserts that women should only express their inner thoughts and beliefs in the context of a private exchange with their husbands. Thus, this passage emphasizes the "ideal of female silence advocated by the manuals of conduct of the period",[62] by demonstrating the concern for women's public speech and its association with infidelity and impurity. The specific mention of the parts of the body —mouth, and ear— is an indication of the early modern period conventions that considered these items as erotic and sexual organs. As a result,

[60] *The Tragedy of Mariam*, p. 57, act 4, scene 7, v. 428
[61] Idem, p. 57, act 4, scene 7, v. 433.
[62] BENNETT, Alexandra. *Female Performativity in 'The Tragedy of Mariam*, 2000, p. 299.

“the tongue was conceptualized as a substitute for the phallus; the ear served as a receptive passageway penetrable by speech.”[63] There is, then, an equation of verbal —speech— and sexual license that was a main feature of the seventeenth century. Additionally, in Herod’s lines it is indicated a change in the roles: instead of being the one who listens, through a receptive ear, Mariam is actually the one who opens her mouth to speak.

Consequently, we can conclude that the Chorus, Herod, and Salome indicate a critique towards Mariam’s behavior because they consider it as associated with sexual conduct. In this regard, although the judgment expressed by the Chorus is justified, there is still a contradiction: Why only criticize Mariam’s actions and not Salome’s? In other words, whereas Mariam clearly states her chastity, and her actions do prove her innocence, Salome acts in a hypocritical manner, plotting against Mariam, and judging a behavior that she herself has. Nevertheless, not only the Chorus, but the whole structure of the play seems to guarantee Salome a happy ending. This specific theme will be discussed in a later section, however, now it is interesting to note that, besides having an excluding and selective criticism towards Mariam, the Chorus is also inconsistent: per times, they indicate that they do believe the Queen to be virtuous in her actions, which makes their judgment oscillating and non-reliable.

In the first ode, it was seen how the Chorus condemned Mariam’s moral standing, while assuming that she craved for “variety”,[64] being then, unchaste. However, in the third ode, there are contradictory perspectives that vary towards Mariam being or not virtuous. At the very beginning of the first stanza, the Chorus shows that for a wife it is not enough to “To keep her spotless from an act of ill/ But from suspicion she should free her life.”[65] That is, more than acting according to the moral appraisal, they should never leave a space for their husband to doubt their fidelity. Additionally, in the third stanza, the Chorus renewed its caution towards women and public speech, indicating the mentioned bond between verbal and sexual license: “That wife her hand against her fame doth rear,/ That more than to her lord alone will give/ A private word to any second ear.”[66] Once again, it is emphasized the need for women to subject their body and minds, exclusively, to the

[63] FALK, Viona. *The Chorus in Elizabeth Cary's 'Tragedy of Mariam'*, 1995, p.18.
[64] *The Tragedy of Mariam*, p. 20, act 1, scene 6, v. 511.
[65] Idem, p. 41, act 3, scene 3, v. 216.
[66] Ibidem, p. 41, act 3, scene 3,v. 227

authority of their husband. Despite reinforcing the traditional views, the Chorus later states that Mariam is the "most chaste",[67] yet because of their outspokenness, as it is also insinuated by Sohemus, she "doth her glory blot,/ And wounds her honor."[68] As a consequence, the readers can glimpse the first contradiction expressed by the Chorus: How can Mariam be, simultaneously, looking for "variety"[69] and the "most chaste"[70] woman?

This very same incoherence is enlarged in the fifth stanza when the Chorus recovers its assumption that a wife can not be chaste if she has shared her thoughts. They judge Mariam's public speech as a way to be graced, receive attention and vainglory. For them, body and mind are correlated, which means that a woman expressing her opinion is a symbol of infidelity and immorality. As a result, Mariam is a transgressor who has stepped her foot out of the convention concerning wifely virtuous behavior: "That seeks to be by public language graced:/ And though her thoughts reflect with purest light,/ Her mind if not peculiar is not chaste./ For in a wife it is no worse to find/, A common body than a common mind."[71] Nevertheless, at the end of this ode, in the sixth stanza, the Chorus appears to reevaluate its previous condemnation of Mariam, expressing that she is essentially still virtuous. In other words, despite criticizing her ingenuity to freely talk to other men, the Chorus no longer understands this action as a wish for "variety",[72] but it acknowledges that Mariam is, physically, chaste. In a way, although there is still a critique to Mariam's immoral action of public speech, the Chorus is, apparently, revising or at least undermining its earlier suspicion and accusation of Mariam's sexual conduct. In fact, the Chorus clearly states that Mariam is innocent: "Doth in a sort her pureness overthrow./ Now Mariam had (but that to this she bent)/ Been free from fear, as well as innocent."[73]

The variance and lack of consistency often demonstrated by the Chorus leads the reader to question whether Mariam was, indeed, guilty. While a contemporary audience would probably not take part in the moral standard that equates speech with sexual license, the early modern period could have the same doubts as the

[67] *The Tragedy of Mariam*, p. 41, act 3, scene 3, v. 231.
[68] Idem, p. 41, act 3, scene 3, v. 232.
[69] Ibidem, p. 20, act 1, scene 6, v. 511.
[70] Ibidem, p. 41, act 3, scene 3, v. 231.
[71] Ibidem, p. 42, act 3, scene 3, v. 240-244.
[72] Ibidem, p. 20, act 1, scene 6, v. 511.
[73] Ibidem, p. 42, act 3, scene 3, v. 248-250.

Chorus. As it was previously indicated, the Closet Drama is structured in a way that it allows the discussion of political themes, by the placement of different arguments in relation to them. In a way, *The Tragedy of Mariam* embedded a polyphony speech towards the ideology about women because Elizabeth Cary acknowledged the Closet Drama was a powerful didactic tool that endorsed critical thought. This calls for an active participation of the reader who is supposed to reflect upon the matters of their society.

However, more than placing opposite views, it should be noticed that the play seems to undermine every judgment that is made by the Chorus, Herod, and Salome towards Mariam. In other words, the readers, by having access to Salome's soliloquies, can comprehend that she is plotting against Mariam. Besides that, different characters, such as Sohemus, Nuntion —the messenger—, Alexandra, Mariam's mother, and the Queen herself, claim for the main character's innocence. Finally, increasing the misjudgment of their perspective, at the end of the play, once the truth is revealed, both the Chorus and Herod seem to come to the realization that her death was a mistake.

Initially, Herod declares that he was deceived by Salome, which was motivated by her own self-interest and wish for revenge: "My Mariam had been breathing by my side:/ Oh, never had I, had I had my will,/ Sent forth command, that Mariam should have died./ But, Salome, thou didst with envy vex".[74] Later, Herod starts to admire his now dead wife, while comparing him to other virtuous women: "For Leda's beauty set his heart on fire,/ Yet she not half so fair as Mariam was".[75] Within this comparison, the King remembers how pure his wife was: "To see chaste Mariam die in age unfit./ But, oh, I am deceived, she passed them all surpassed/ In every gift, in every property: quality/ Her excellencies wrought her timeless fall."[76] At the end of his speech, Herod demonstrates that his decision to order Mariam's execution was, more than insinuated by Salome, a result of his jealousy. For the King, as for almost every men during the early modern period, on account of a misogynist perspective of women, beauty and chastity could not walk hand in hand: "Her heav'nly beauty 'twas that made me think/ That it with chastity could never dwell:/ But now I see that Heav'n in her did link/ A spirit and a person to excel."[77]

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[74] *The Tragedy of Mariam*, p. 69, act 5, scene 1, v. 158-161.
[75] Idem, p. 71, act 5, scene 1, v. 217-218.
[76] Ibidem, p. 71, act 5, scene 1, v. 226-229.
[77] Ibidem, p. 67, act 5, scene 1, v. 243-246.

As a result, Herod concludes that Mariam was an exception, a woman that could reunite beauty and character, and thus, he feels remorse, grief, and regret for condemning her. There is then a moment of self-reflection, during Herod's soliloquy, that indicates a departure from the traditional view that associated outspokenness with sexual conduct. On the contrary, Herod appears to be aware that his suspicions in relation to Mariam's infidelity were based on his own jealousy, and his preconceptions about women, which were both enlarged by Salome. Moreover, this final moment puts an end to the King's constant shift between doubting Mariam, and condemning her or assuming her as chaste, and worth saving. In other words, despite choosing for the first option, the King will have to live with the consequence of his actions, and thus, he finishes his speech:

> When thou at once shalt die and find a grave;/ A stone upon the vault someone shall lay,/ Which monument shall an inscription have,/ And these shall be the words it shall contain:/ Here Herod lies, that hath his Mariam slain. (*The Tragedy of Mariam*, p. 72, act 5, scene 1, v. 254-258).

Similarly, the Chorus also has this same process of showing an unstable perception of Mariam, until finally admitting her to be "guiltless".[78] As observed within the analysis of the odes, many times the Chorus provides ambiguous characterizations of Mariam, and contradictory views when it comes to her moral status. Sharing the same dichotomy as Herod, the Chorus undergoes a path that illustrates to the readers the complexity of the early modern period when it comes to gender roles. In a way, as previously observed, the criticism made by the Chorus is, often, undermined by Mariam lines, which demonstrate she did not intend to either engage in any love affair or to replace Herod. Additionally, her actions also proved that she stayed chaste and loyal to her husband, despite not feeling particularly in love with him anymore. However, as seen with Herod, at the end of the play, the Chorus finally adheres to one perspective, while summarizing and commenting on the last moments which included Mariam's death:

> Tonight our Herod doth alive remain,/ The guiltless Mariam is deprived of breath;/ Stout Constabarus both divorced and slain,/ The valiant

[78] *The Tragedy of Mariam*, p. 73, act 5, scene 1, v. 272.

> sons of Babas have their death,/ Pheroras sure his love to be bereft,/ If Salome her suit unmade had left./ Herod this morning did expect with joy,/ To see his Mariam's much belove`d face:/ And yet ere night he did her life destroy,/ And surely thought she did her name disgrace./ Yet now again, so short do humors last,/ He both repents her death and knows her chaste. (*The Tragedy of Mariam*, p. 73, act 5, scene 1, v. 271-282).

In the lines above it can be observed how the Chorus admits that Mariam is guiltless, and thus, it problematizes its early assumption that the Queen had engaged in sexual conduct through public speech. As noticed with Herod's soliloquy, the Chorus also calls attention to the role played by Salome while guaranteeing Mariam's execution. Similarly, some lines later, it condemns Herod's lack of wisdom and critical thought to see Mariam as she is, chaste: "Had he with wisdom now her death delayed,/ He at his pleasure might command her death".[79] However, within this critique, the Chorus seems to ignore that they also had a misjudgment of Mariam's character. As a result, although, throughout the play, the Chorus provide almost a didactic description of how a virtuous wife should act, they prove themselves to be an unreliable source. In a way, then, Elizabeth Cary seems to be problematizing and undermining the patriarchal discourse towards gender roles.

Furthermore, both Herod and the Chorus fail to acknowledge that Salome was the one who should have received such evaluation. To put into other words, during the unfolding of the play, the readers observe Salome acting in opposition to the ideals of that period: she is outspoken; she claims for divorce; she wishes for variety; and, yet, she is not censored by the Chorus, or any other instance. In fact, the lack of critical comment towards Salome demonstrates that the Chorus has not only a subjective perspective but also an arbitrary one. Hence, it could be argued that Elizabeth Cary, intentionally, decides to place a polyphony that presents contradictory ideas as a means to criticize the inconsistencies in seventeenth century ideologies about women. Indeed, the constant change of perception that is noticeable through the discrepancy between some lines from both Herod, and the Chorus, indicates that the gender roles, and the ideals associated with female virtuosity were not clearly defined. Additionally, the double standard that allows,

[79] *The Tragedy of Mariam*, p. 73, act 5, scene 1, v. 283-284.

ironically, Mariam to be punished while Salome is, somehow, rewarded for wicked conduct, also demonstrates the ambivalence of Elizabeth Cary's society.

Nevertheless, even though in the play Salome is not punished for her actions, while the plot is unfolding, the readers are invited to sympathize and take Mariam's side, which means she is constructed as a heroine, while Salome is seen as a villain. In fact, characterization, in *The Tragedy of Mariam*, appears to be constructed relationally, and through comparison, which means that the readers need to be introduced to the traits of one character in order to appreciate the features from another. This is clearly observed by the opposing pair, Salome and Mariam. In other words, the spectator witnesses the first female character operating, hypocritically, on behalf of her own interests and well-being, leading her to plot against several characters. That is, she criticizes and accuses Mariam of infidelity, while in fact, she is the one who wishes to engage in another relationship, which is also her third sexual involvement. Additionally, Salome takes advantage of the patriarchal context, although she is herself an example of a wicked wife, and places this male perspective as well as authoritarian ideology towards Mariam.

As a consequence, Salome is portrayed as an example of that ideal of "*female fatale*", which was paradigmatically represented in Shakespeare's Macbeth. In other words, as indicated previously, Salome is described as a woman that is wise, "spoiled, seductive, and a definitive evil influence on man".[80] Overall, during the play, she is responsible either directly or indirectly for the death of Mariam, Constabarus, Babas' sons, Sohemus and also the butler. However, unlike the other transgressive female characters from the standard public performances, her verbal and sexual conduct are not punished. Hence, Elizabeth Cary "creates a controversial but dramatically appealing image of women's success in the patriarchal order, which is achieved by the suppression of other female characters".[81]

On the other hand, Mariam is represented as being the victim of a system that fails to acknowledge her pure heart and conduct. Besides acting in a coherent way, which means that Mariam's speeches are in agreement with her actions, the description of her death also increases her perception as a martyrdom. First of all, it is known that the story is based on a legend from the Old Testament. In this regard, it

[80] MCMULEN, Norma. *The Education of English Gentlewomen 1540-1640*, 1977, p. 87.
[81] HAMAMRA, Bilal. *Tell thou my lord thou saw'st me lose my breath: Silence, speech, and authorial identity in Cary's The Tragedy of Mariam*, 2018, p.5.

seems comprehensive to associate Mariam's death with Cryst's crucifixion. As seen in the passage of the bible, Jesus is also convicted for a crime he did not commit. However, instead of arguing on behalf of his salvation, he chooses to accept, silently, his punishment. By the same token, Mariam is also aware that she is unfairly accused, and yet she assumes the same posture as Cryst, which leads Nuntio, the messenger, to describe her death as a "triumph".[82] Accordingly he also is responsible for telling Mariam's last sentences to Herod: "Tell thou my lord thou saw'st me loose my breath/ If guiltily, eternal be my death/ By three days hence, if wishes could revive, I know himself would make me oft alive."[83] In these lines, the reference to the bible is also observed by the possible association between Mariam's "three days",[84] and the three days that separate Cryst's crucifixion to His resurrection.

Additionally, during the play, it becomes evident that Mariam is betrayed by her own servant, the butler, which could be read as a metaphor for Judas in the Bible. A further indication that allows such a comparison is that the butler, as it is also done by Judas, filled with regret, commits suicide. Therefore, there seems to be an attempt to portray Mariam's death as not only unfair but also instauring this character as a martyr. Whereas, operating by this same biblical approximation, Salome is associated with the serpent, a statement Constabarus elucidates: "Her mouth, though serpent-like it never hisses,/ Yet like a serpent, poisons where it kisses."[85] Faced with these lines an assumption can be made: Constabarus is making such a comparison because, as the serpent who manages to deceive Eve, Salome is seductive and takes advantage of all men, Josephus, himself, Silleus, and even Herod. In regard to the first three men, Salome literally "poisons where it kisses",[86] which means that love is what drives them to be played by this woman. While, when it comes to Herod, it is Salome's speech that infects his ears, and contamines his perspective of Mariam.

Accordingly, the readers can admit that, throughout the play, Mariam suffered erroneous misjudgements, and her silence can be read as a subjective and political form of resistance in relation to the tyrannical and authoritarian system. Nevertheless, it should likewise be noticed that, more than choosing to stay in

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[82] *The Tragedy of Mariam*, p. 66, act 5, scene 1, v. 56.
[83] Idem, p. 66, act 5, scene 1, v. 73, 75, 77, 78.
[84] Ibidem, p. 66, act 5, scene 1, v. 77.
[85] Ibidem, p. 31, act 2, scene 4, v. 333-334.
[86] Ibidem, p. 31, act 2, scene 4, v. 334.

silence, Mariam is also silenced: Herod's order to execute her worked as his last attempt to reassume control over Mariam, enclosing her mind and mouth. That happens because, as the play shows, the Queen no longer wanted to act upon her husband's desire. Faced with that, it is comprehensive how female speech is able to destabilize men's power, increasing and promoting male anxiety on account of their lack of control on women. As a result, besides pointing out the incoherences of her society, which was passing through a transitional period that reviewed some traditional values, Elizabeth Cary also relies upon the deconstruction of the patriarchal views about women. By the same token, she appears to be criticizing not only the men's conduct, who can speak untruths, arbitrarily decide to murder, and punish their wives but also of women themselves who, in order to survive, needed to turn their backs against each other.

For being a Closet Drama, which engages in the political, philosophical, social, and even ethical themes, Elizabeth Cary appears to express this multiperspective, and sometimes, incoherent views as means to invite their readers to glimpse how these features operate in their society. Hence, the dialectical structure, which brings different and, oftentimes, contradictory notions, guarantees to the readers different arguments, inviting them to engage in an intellectual exercise of reflectiveness concerning their reality. However, there seems to be a preference or at least a stronger defense of one specific side that indicates how Elizabeth Cary claimed for a change. To put into other words, the lack of reliability when it comes to both the Chorus and Herod's primer judgment of Mariam results from Cary's characterization of these two instances as members of "a cultural group whose perspective on Mariam's history is informed by its contradictory ideology about women".[87] Furthermore, since the male perspective is often undermined, the play demonstrates how men could use speech as a way to deceive, lie, and betray, guaranteeing them the ultimate power. Therefore, contrary to Mariam that chooses to stay in silence, men in the play do not suppress themselves, even though the events indicate to the readers that they, probably, should do it.

As a consequence, it could be argued that Cary's employment of such inconsistencies, when it comes to both the Chorus and Herod's perceptions, can be understood, on the one hand, "as a criticism of the sexual double standard which

[87] LEWALSKI, Barbara. *Writing Women in Jacobean England*, 1991, p. 198.

permits inconsistency only in men."[88] This double standard is, constantly, mentioned by Salome who manages to find some gaps in the patriarchal system, and takes them into advantage in order to achieve what she desires. Despite being a woman, she acts and advocates for females having the same right as men. Thus it can be observed how she subscribes to this masculine logic of speech. While all the other female characters are portrayed as being stable and coherent, Salome presents not only a disguise of her self-interests but also has a change of mind and heart. In other words, Mariam can not be, simultaneously, chaste and unchaste; virtuous in body, but not in mind. However, Salome can be inconsistent, which is indicated by her volubility towards love and the men she gets involved with: first Josephus, then Constabarus, and now Silleus. In fact, she acts in the very same way as Herod, who was previously married to Doris, but left her for Mariam. Moreover, on the other hand, these inconsistencies, as this monograph have often renewed, are also a result of the seventeenth century having unstable guidelines when it comes to its comprehension of women's virtuosity.

Indeed, although placed in contraposition, both Mariam and Salome seem to advocate for a change in the traditional gender roles, by arguing and claiming for women's rights. This point will be further elaborated in the next section of this monograph, which will be dedicated to the analysis of the female characters. For now, then, it is important to observe how Elizabeth Cary manages to subvert the patriarchal ideology, not only in terms of the organization of her play, which orchestrates female free speech, but also by integrating political, social, and public debate. The first instance that allowed us to identify this movement was the Chorus, which placed inconsistent comments regarding Mariam's actions that later proved to be misjudgments. Ergo, this section engaged in showing the multiple perspectives about the gender roles, the patriarchal ideals of female virtuosity, and the wife's duty to subordinate herself to the authority of her husband. Within this, by showing the unfolding of the plot, and the incoherences of not only the Chorus but also of Herod and Salome, it could be concluded that Elizabeth Cary places almost an open political statement: the patriarchal ideology of the seventeenth century guaranteed not only the subjugation of women, and the double standard that legitimate inconsistent behavior for men, but also female rivalry.

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[88] FALK, Viona. *The Chorus in Elizabeth Cary's 'Tragedy of Mariam'*, 1995, p. 21.

Despite being a Closet Drama, which was supposed to be read in the private sphere, the play manages to engage, simultaneously, in social, political, and gender debate, transcending to the public environment. In a way, then, Elizabeth Cary can subscribe her views upon such matters, encouraging other women to both reflect and come up with their own conclusions. Finally, it should likewise be noted that, Cary makes usage of a domestic theme, after all, the play revolves, mainly, around a familiar issue, while addressing the political problems of Herod's rule. In other words, *The Tragedy of Mariam*, also increases the unstable division between private and public by addressing the themes of tyranny and resistance in civic and domestic contexts. As explained before, Mariam's silence is both a subjective and political form of resisting the patriarchal order: she is departing from the subordination to her husband, and also becoming a martyr. Moreover, there is somehow a metonymic process in which Mariam's lack of voice and repression represents the atmosphere of a tyrannical and authoritarian rule. Under this light, Elizabeth Cary shows how marriage was a form of imprisoning, enclosing, and guaranteeing female constraint, functioning in the same way as the civil tyrannical rule.

3.2- The construction of female characters in *The Tragedy of Mariam*.

The previous section dealt with the analysis of the Chorus, providing an examination of the inconsistency of the male-perspective about women, in the seventeenth century patriarchal society. Within this, it was possible to observe an initial movement in which Elizabeth Cary could subvert the traditional order, engaging in the political debate, while problematizing, and undermining both the gender roles and the ideals associated with women's moral appraisal. As a result, Cary could claim for a change in such a pattern, something that is also stated by their female characters. In this regard, although some comments were made previously, this section is dedicated to the analysis of how female speech could advocate for this social change. Moreover, it will be likewise observed the interaction between the female characters, and how their characterization was built through their opposition. The idea is to demonstrate that Elizabeth Cary calls attention to the lack of union between women, once they had internalized the values of their repressive patriarchal and double standard society. Thus, rather than working together to undermine the authoritarian male-domination, they, oftentimes, emphasized this system in order to achieve their own benefits.

To start with, a primer indication that Elizabeth Cary intended to give voice to her female characters can be seen through the amount of soliloquies that are proclaimed by women, during *The Tragedy of Mariam*. This dramatic element was a resource attributed only to men in the context of public performances, specially because of two aspects, already explained: i- female speech was intrinsically associated with lasciviousness and/or sexual conduct, which means it should, at all causes, be avoided; and ii- women were represented by boys, so their lines needed to be short in order to prevent the possibility of "breaking into a male-register".[89] However, in *The Tragedy of Mariam*, there is a continuum in which a woman author writes not only about but for a female character, which is not endangered of being portrayed by a man. Consequently, the closet drama authorizes and legitimates female speech that is constructed, for once, through the perspective of a woman.

In fact, *The Tragedy of Mariam* increases the power attributed to women once the play starts with the voice of a female character: Mariam's soliloquy. The very first

[89] BLOOM, Gina. *Voice in Motion: Staging Gender, Shaping Sound in Early Modern England*, 2007, p. 18.

line proclaimed by the Queen indicates the traditional equation of speech and sexual behavior, while also justifying her need to speak: “How oft have I with public voice run on/ To censure Rome’s last hero for deceit”.[90] Despite being aware of women needing to subjugate themselves to their husbands, her conflict is so complex that her speech is not a transgression that should be censored but an outstanding event. In a way, her soliloquy disguises or at least deviates the attention of the fact that she is a woman, explicitly, engaging into public speech, illustrating exactly how the closet drama operates. In other words, similarly to her heroine, Elizabeth Cary also manages to ‘hide’ her critiques of society, as well as her strategies to subvert the order and advocate for women’s rights. It could be suggested, then, that Cary shares the same anxieties as Mariam when it comes to female public speech, and the fear that the patriarchal ideology would condemn it. Furthermore, this passage is likewise an example of the text being a self-reflected play, which meditates upon its own creative forms of transgression:

> [t]he fact that a woman chooses to begin her play with her heroine musing upon the significance of public utterance is highly suggestive of the metadramatic possibilities of the text, the transgressive nature of both Mariam’s and her creator’s public words. (BENNETT, 2000, p. 298).

Moreover, during this initial part of the play, it can be already observed that Mariam desires to pursue a subjectiveness that is no longer defined by her husband or subjected to his authority. Throughout her first soliloquy, the readers can grasp her confusion towards her real feelings for Herod. She thought her whole life to have loved her husband, yet now that she knows he has ordered her death in case of his, and that he was responsible for the murders of both her grandfather and brother, she is no longer sure about such an affection. Additionally, Mariam also illustrates the reality of married women during the early modern period: rather than being a subject, they were subordinate to their husbands, and should act upon their commands. In other words, Herod was authoritative and tyrannical as a King and as a husband, although he justified his attitudes on behalf of love, besides being also ensured by the patriarchal system. Oscillating between grief and relief, Mariam justifies her speech as a way to expose Herod’s actions, which made her often desired to be free

[90] *The Tragedy of Mariam*, p. 3, act 1, scene 1, v. 1-2.

from him. She claims, thus, that it was his jealousy and the fact that he constantly deprived her from freedom that made her, sometimes, wish him to be dead:

> One object yields both grief and joy:/ You wept indeed, when on his worth you thought,/ But joyed that slaughter did your foe destroy./ So at his death your eyes true drops did rain,/ Whom dead, you did not wish alive again./ When Herod lived, that now is done to death,/ Oft have I wished that I from him were free:/ Oft have I wished that he might lose his breath,/ Oft have I wished his carcass dead to see./ Then rage and scorn had put my love to flight,/ That love which once on him was firmly set:/ Hate hid his true affection from my sight,/ And kept my heart from paying him his debt./ And blame me not, for Herod's jealousy/ Had power even constancy itself to change:/ For he, by barring me from liberty,/ To shun my ranging, taught me first to range./ (*The Tragedy of Mariam*, p. 3, act 1, scene 1, v. 10-26).

Even though Mariam demonstrates she wanted to be, somehow, free from Herod who was the reason for so much suffering for the Queen and her family, she still had a conflict. After the excerpt above, Mariam once again states her affection and nurture towards Herod, which was reciprocated: "The tender love that he to Mariam bare./ And mine to him".[91] Some lines later, the Queen recalls that Herod had annulled her subjectiveness in such a way that even her death was subjugated to his. Nevertheless, despite feeling repulsed, she still cries his death because she knows he did love her. In her lines, it can be observed how Mariam is aware of her contradictory feelings, however, she also states that she can not avoid its tension: "My death to his had been unseparate./ These thoughts have power, his death to make me bear,/ Nay more, to wish the news may firmly hold:/ Yet cannot this repulse some falling tear,/ That will against my will some grief unfold."[92] By the same token, the next verses also placed this confusion. While she knew Herod loved her, which means she not only should but also owed him to mourn his loss, Mariam indicates that she would rather be a milkmaid than married to him: "And more I owe him for his love to me,/ The deepest love that ever yet was seen:/ Yet had I rather much a milkmaid be,/ Than be the monarch of Judea's queen."[93]

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[91] *The Tragedy of Mariam*, p. 4, act 1, scene 1, v. 32-33.
[92] Idem, p. 5, act 1, scene 1, v. 50-54.
[93] Ibidem, p. 5, act 1, scene 1, v. 55-58.

The constant placement of arguments, which generate a shifting between opposite feelings —grief and relief; joy and sadness; freedom and guiltiness— elucidate that, despite aiming to be free from this restriction, Mariam had internalized the social conventions, gender roles, and moral conducts of a wife in the context of a patriarchal society. To put into other words, the Queen, at this initial moment, could not completely step out of the tradition, and place herself in opposition to her husband. On the other hand, her inner conflict indicates that Mariam wanted to be free from the hierarchical system that legitimize male authority, and also the views concerning female public speech, which were also reinforced by the Chorus during his judgment of the Queen.

Nevertheless, the protagonist seems to go through a change in her character during the play. As a result, the readers accompany Mariam becoming, slowly, detached not only from the constraints imposed by the patriarchal society but also from Herod and the love she used to feel for him. Her mother, Alexandra, plays a major role in helping Mariam solve her inner conflict, while convincing her that she should feel nothing other than happiness for Herod's death. During her speech, Alexandra enumerates several reasons for Mariam not to cry over this event:

> The news we heard did tell the tyrant's end:/ What weep'st thou for thy brother's murd'rer's sake?/ Will ever wight a tear for Herod spend?/ My curse pursue his breathless trunk and spirit,/ Base Edomite, the damne`d Esau's heir:/ Must he ere Jacob's child the crown inherit?/ Must he, vile wretch, be set in David's chair?/ No, David's soul, within the bosom placed/ Of our forefather Abram, was ashamed:/ To see his seat with such a toad disgraced,/ That seat that hath by Judah's race been famed./ Thou fatal enemy to royal blood,/ Did not the murder of my boy suffice,/ To stop thy cruel mouth that gaping stood,/ But must thou dim the mild Hircanus' eyes?/ My gracious father, whose too ready hand/ Did lift this Idumean from the dust:/ And he, ungrateful caitiff, did withstand/ The man that did in him most friendly trust./ What kingdom's right could cruel Herod claim,/ Was he not Esau's issue, heir of hell? (*The Tragedy of Mariam*, p. 6, act 1, scene 2, v. 80-100).

Additionally, Alexandra's arguments also elucidate Herod's lack of consistency, something that was previously discussed on account of the double standard society, which guarantees men the right to act according to their wills. The female character problematizes the legitimacy of Herod's actions, which were

considered to be justified upon his love for Mariam. Contrary to this, Alexandra questions if the Queen does indeed believe that the reason he murdered both her brother and grandfather was for her to have royal power. For Alexandra, such a claim was proved untrue since he had ordered Mariam to be executed in case of his death. Moreover, the mother expresses that, once being inconsistent as well as volatile, Herod had become unreliable, which means he could, at any moment, not only leave Mariam but also condemned her to an unjustified death. This lack of reliability is sustained by the fact that Herod was, earlier, married to Doris. Thus, in the same way Constabarus claims Salome to be unstable, Alexandra also draws attention to the King's inconsistency:

> Was love the cause, can Mariam deem it true,/ That Mariam gave commandment for her death?/ I know by fits he showed some signs of love,/ And yet not love, but raging lunacy: / And this his hate to thee may justly prove,/ That sure he hates Hircanus' family./ Who knows if he, unconstant wavering lord,/ His love to Doris had renewed again?/ And that he might his bed to her afford,/ Perchance he wished that Mariam might be slain. (*The Tragedy of Mariam*, p. 7, act 1, scene 2, v. 121-130).

Regarding the excerpt above, it can be concluded that Alexandra, intrinsically, associates the domestic environment with the political one, which was a feature from the early modern period. During that time, the idea of one's character and worth was connected to lineage, and heritage. Thus, it can be observed another aspect that is dichotomous: instead of being private, the family relationship was responsible for guiding the political, social, and economical dynamics of the seventeenth century society. As a consequence, by dealing, apparently, with issues that revolve towards family matters —marriage, divorce, infidelity—, Elizabeth Cary was simultaneously describing the social organization of her period. This is clearly depicted by Alexandra's sentence: "The news we heard did tell the tyrant's end".[94] In her lines, there is the association of civil and domestic contexts once she is, concurrently, stating that the authoritarian rule of Herod has come to an end, and that her daughter is, finally, free from the constraints imposed by her marriage to Herod.

[94] *The Tragedy of Mariam*, p. 6, act 1, scene 2, v. 80.

More than Alexandra's attempt to convince her daughter, the ultimate event that seems to provide a change of character in Mariam, making her mind and heart clear about her feelings, is the announcement of Herod's return. Once aware that the King is not only alive but coming back home, Mariam is finally resolved upon neither continuing to pretend to be at peace with Herod's actions nor to disassembling a fake love: "I will not to his love be reconciled,/ With solemn vows I have forsworn his bed."[95] Although Sohemus advises her that she should break those vows that would generate her divorce, the Queen is finally confident about what she wants, which means she can analyze her previous behavior as hypocritical:

> I'll rather break/ The heart of Mariam./ Cursed is my fate:/ But speak no more to me, in vain ye speak/ To live with him I so profoundly hate. [...] And must I to my prison turn again?/ Oh, now I see I was an hypocrite:/ I did this morning for his death complain,/ And yet do mourn, because he lives, ere night/. When I his death believed, compassion wrought,/ And was the stickler 'twixt my heart and him: mediator/ But now that curtain's drawn from off my thought,/ Hate doth appear again with visage grim:/ And paints the face of Herod in my heart,/ In horrid colors with detested look:/ Then fear would come, but scorn doth play her part,/ And saith that scorn with fear can never brook./ 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./ Else Salome in vain might spend her wind,/ In vain might Herod's mother whet her tongue:/ In vain had they complotted and combined,/ For I could overthrow them all ere long./ Oh, what a shelter is mine innocence,/ To shield me from the pangs of inward grief:/ 'Gainst all mishaps it is my fair defence,/ And to my sorrows yields a large relief./ To be commandress of the triple earth,/ And sit in safety from a fall secure:/ To have all nations celebrate my birth, I would not that my spirit were impure./ Let my distresse`d state unpitied be,/ Mine innocence is hope enough for me. (*The Tragedy of Mariam*, p. 38, act 3, scene 3, v. 135-180).

In the excerpt above, more than concluding that her mourning for Herod's death was a consequence of her compassion that made her not see the King for who he really is, Mariam also demonstrates that she will not dissimulate in order to both please Herod and save her life. Despite mobilizing that she would, indeed, feel

[95] *The Tragedy of Mariam*, p. 38, act 3, scene 3, v. 133-134.

scared for the consequences of her choice, Mariam claims that “scorn”[96] will motivate her to keep honest to herself. Additionally, she finds comfort in knowing that she is innocent, and will keep pure by acting in the opposite way of Salome who is hypocritical, manipulative, and dissimulative. As previously stated, the play seems to place these two characters as an opposed and dynamic pair: while the unfolding of the plot guarantees the readers to consider Mariam to be the heroine, Salome’s actions are seen as wicked and reprehensible.

Before taking a look at the complex relationship and interaction between those female characters, it is important to elucidate that Mariam’s posture is a step towards female emancipation. To put into other words, the Queen will act consistently in relation to her statements, which means that even after Herod’s arrival Mariam will not change her mind. Actually, in their first encounter Mariam decides to question him about the legitimacy of his love for her since he murdered the members of her family. In addition, she also emphasizes that she never claimed for power or rich, which he used as a justification for plotting against her brother, and making her the Queen:

> I neither have of power nor riches want,/ I have enough, nor do I wish for more:/ Your offers to my heart no ease can grant,/ Except they could my brother’s life restore./ No, had you wished the wretched Mariam glad,/ Or had your love to her been truly tied:/ Nay, had you not desired to make her sad,/ My brother nor my grandsire had not died. (*The Tragedy of Mariam*, p. 46, act 4, acene 3, v. 109- 116).

Faced with her unexpected discontentment, Herod tries to argue on behalf of his reputation, and the reasons that led him to commit such actions Mariam incriminates him for. Initially, he expresses that many times he has shown and claimed to love the Queen. Then, he argues that Hircanus had previously plotted against him, in an attempt to behead him. Consequently, his condemnation of Mariam’s grandfather was in defense of his own life, and for the great benefit of the realm. However, Herod states that he does feel sorrow for knowing he had murdered someone that shared the same blood as his beloved wife. Additionally, he also

[96] *The Tragedy of Mariam*, p. 39, act 3, scene 3, v. 161.

express some grief towards the death of Aristobolus, Mariam's brother, by claiming, that he had made him priest:

> Wilt thou believe no oaths to clear thy lord?/ How oft have I with execration sworn:/ Thou art by me belov'd, by me adored,/ Yet are my protestations heard with scorn./ Hircanus plotted to deprive my head/ Of this long-settled honor that I wear:/ And therefore I did justly doom him dead,/ To rid the realm from peril, me from fear./ Yet I for Mariam's sake do so repent / The death of one whose blood she did inherit:/ I wish I had a kingdom's treasure spent, /So I had ne'er expelled Hircanus' spirit./ As I affected that same noble youth/ In lasting infamy my name enroll/ If I not mourned his death with hearty truth./ Did I not show to him my earnest love,/ When I to him the priesthood did restore,/ And did for him a living priest remove,/ Which never had been done but once before?/ (*The Tragedy of Mariam*, p. 46, act 4, scene 3, v. 117-135).

Despite his argument, Herod does not manage to convince Mariam, which continues to disbelieve him. As a result, the King seems to change his strategy, and advises Mariam to change her mood once her outspokenness, and lack of submission would be punished: "I will not speak, unless to be believed,/ This froward humor will not do you good:/ It hath too much already Herod grieved,/ To think that you on terms of hate have stood."[97] Accordingly, he asks her to subjugate herself, once again, behaving in reliance to his terms: "Yet smile, my dearest Mariam, do but smile,/ And I will all unkind conceits exile."[98] The Queen, however, maintains her word, and explicitly says she will not "disguise", renewing her intention to not be hypocritical. The King, hence, questions whether Mariam believes his love, to which she answers: "I will not build on so unstable ground."[99] As a result, in the same way her mother, Alexandra, had previously argued, Mariam is aware that the King lacks consistency, and acts upon his passions.

The dialogue between Mariam and Herod, paradigmatically, illustrates how this woman wants to distantiate herself from the constraints of her tyrannical, authoritarian, unstable, arbitrary, and manipulative husband. Despite not explicitly advocating for the bill of the divorce, as it is done by Salome, her coherent conduct demonstrates that she is not only innocent but also dignified. In other words, contrary

[97] *The Tragedy of Mariam*, p. 47, act 4, scene 3, v. 138-141.
[98] Idem, p. 47, act 4, scene 3, v. 142-143.
[99] Ibidem, p. 47, act 4, scene 3, v. 147.

to Salome who, as Herod, plots, disguises, deceives, and dissimulates to achieve her self-interests, Mariam attempts to do it by acting fairly. Accordingly, even if the Queen engages in public speech, Elizabeth Cary seems to undermine or even puts into question the common association between this occurrence and sexual behavior. Although Herod, the Chorus, and Salome equate both conducts, Mariam contradicts this view: "[t]he image of a female mouth promiscuously opening to a male ear rewrites Mariam's fault as one of double excess or 'openness,' whereas what the play actually shows is that Mariam's verbal openness is a sign of sexual closure".[100] To put into other words, while the Queen is speaking she constantly demonstrates her faithfulness, dissociating her speech from either desire for variety or sexual availability.

On the other hand, Salome represents this equation, which means that despite having a similarity when it comes to breaking the silence, their speech elucidates different visions. Contrary to Mariam, not only do Salome's speech indicate sexual availability but they are also sustained by her sexuality, which guarantees her the 'right of speaking'. While Mariam aims to constitute an subjectiveness that is no longer attached to her husband, instauring an identity that is not only independent but also contrary to his, Salome's agency relies on her ability to disguise her intentions, and modulate her speech in order to achieve her goals. There seems to be, thus, an ethical problem: if Salome is the one who thrives successfully, while Mariam is punished, which message is the play conveying? One possible hypothesis would be to understand Salome as a result of the patriarchal system, which means she is herself a victim that realized, in order to achieve her interests, it was necessary to act like a man. In a way, as it was previously stated, Salome is portrayed with some male-features and claiming for male rights, such as the divorce. However, she does that by disguising and hiding her true intentions. In fact, although Salome speaks freely with her lovers —Constabarus, and Silleus—, she modulates her speech when in a dialogue with Herod, showing that she was aware of the hierarchical mechanisms of her society.

Moreover, Salome could also be seen as the representation of female writers in Closet Drama: they could take advantage of this new mechanism to subvert the

[100] FERGUSON, Margaret W. "The Spectre of Resistance: The Tragedy of Mariam (1613)." In: *Readings in Renaissance Women's Drama: Criticism, History, and Performance 1594-1998*, 1998, p.188.

patriarchal order, without being punished. In other words, by knowing the system, like Salome did, Elizabeth Cary could take advantage of this genre to place different arguments which criticized the male-dominated society and also claimed for women's rights. In a way, then, the author could put together two female characters that, despite having similar desires, such as the divorce and women's free speech, represent opposed ideals, which elucidate the two perspectives regarding women: wicked —Salome—, or virtuous —Mariam—. Nevertheless, instead of subscribing to one of those ideas, Elizabeth Cary makes use of this dichotomy to demonstrate that, contrary to the common ideology, these categories were not stable. On the other hand, there was a dialectic movement between them. Once again, it gets clear how this seems to be a strategy that emphasizes the double standard society that guaranteed only men to be inconsistent, after all, women needed to be always flat, stable, and placed at one of those poles. That happened because, by narrowing the possibilities of women and describing them with simple characteristics, it was easier to guarantee the male control over women. Additionally, by depicting Mariam's final ending, with her tragic death, Cary invited the reader to feel sympathetic for her, and thus, the critique to this misogynist order is enlarged. In this regard, we can observe the importance of the Chorus making comments upon Mariam's actions, that is:

> Although the Chorus offers instructive statements on what comprises virtuous behavior in women, ironically, the Chorus is unaware that if we view its lessons with a critical eye we will learn that patriarchal ideology is riddled with contradictions. (...) The ambiguity of the ending, for example, invites us to decide for ourselves whether Mariam's actions have been praiseworthy. (FALK, 1995, p. 1).

As a result, even though we have chosen to split our analysis into small sections that look up specific aspects of the play, it is undeniable that they work together in order to establish both the plot and its political as well as critical statement of seventeenth century reality. For instance, if the Chorus did not comment on Mariam's conduct, while choosing to ignore Salome's, the hypocrisy of the patriarchal society would be less evident. Having said that, it is likewise necessary to comprehend the relationship between those two women, which also plays a major role in the perception of the effects that the male-dominated political system had on women. Accordingly, Salome's actions make it possible for the

readers to grasp how the patriarchal ideology influences and undermines the possibility of a respectful interaction between women. *The Tragedy of Mariam* places to the readers a society that is structured upon a hierarchical social order and, thus, "individuals are permitted to criticize only their equals or inferiors".[101] Therefore, not only Salome, but even Mariam, Alexandra, and Doris expressed, in their lines, insults and criticisms to other female characters, as a way to instaure their superiority over them. This means that, although collectively imprisoned in a system that orchestrates women's subjection to men, the female characters can not realize they made use of the same violent and misogynistic discourse against one another.

As a matter of fact, at the very beginning of the play, in the dialogue between Mariam and Salome, it can be seen how the Queen diminishes this other woman, mainly on account of both her illegitimate right to ascend the throne, and her race:

> Scorn those that are for thy companions held./ Though I thy brother's face had never seen,/ My birth thy baser birth so far excelled,/ I had to both of you the princess been./ Thou parti-Jew, and parti-Edomite,/ Thou mongrel: issued from rejected race/ Thy ancestors against the Heavens did fight,/ And thou like them wilt heavenly birth disgrace. (*The Tragedy of Mariam*, p. 10, act 1, scene 3, v. 231-238).

By the same token, it is her contempt for Mariam that leads Salome to plot against this woman. At the beginning of the above-mentioned dialogue, she accuses the Queen of being unfaithful to Herod, endorsing the patriarchal discourse from the Chorus: "More plotting yet?/ Why, now you have the thing/ For which so oft you spent your suppliant breath:/ And Mariam hopes to have another king. /Her eyes do sparkle joy for Herod's death."[102] Furthermore, while she tries to convince Herod that Mariam was having an affair with Sohemus, she also assaults and offends this woman: "She speaks a beauteous language, but within/ Her heart is false as powder: and her tongue/ Doth but allure the auditors to sin,/ And is the instrument to do you wrong."[103] Thus, more than proclaiming cruel statements in relation to Mariam, Salome plots against her to both achieve what she wanted, which indicates how she had internalized the conventions of patriarchy and managed to use them for her own

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[101] FALK, Viona. *The Chorus in Elizabeth Cary's 'Tragedy of Mariam'*, 1995, p. 38.
[102] *The Tragedy of Mariam*, p. 10, act 1, scene 3, v. 207-210.
[103] Idem, p. 57, act 4, scene 7, v. 428-431.

benefit, and to get revenge from the vex and bad comments the Queen had made about her, previously.

Finally, Doris, despite not being a main character, is also subscribed to this logic, something that can be observed during her final dialogue with Mariam. As the play demonstrates, Doris was the previous wife of Herod, with whom he had a son. However, on account of his inconsistency, and the male right to claim for both divorce and variety, Herod decided to leave her and get married with Mariam. For being inscribed under the male-dominated society, Doris does not seem to resent Herod as much as she resents Mariam: "I am that Doris that was once beloved, Beloved by Herod,/ Herod's lawful wife:/ 'Twas you that Doris from his side removed,/ And robbed from me the glory of my life."[104] She asks Mariam about the reasons why Herod chose her rather than Doris, which was probably a more suitable question for the King. Yet, she seems to make ironical questions that only elucidates how better wife, more virtuous, and honored she was in comparison to Mariam:

> What did he hate me for: for simple truth?/ For bringing beauteous babes for love to him?/ For riches, noble birth, or tender youth? Or for no stain did Doris' honor dim?/ Oh, tell me, Mariam, tell me if you know,/ Which fault of these made Herod Doris' foe? (*The Tragedy of Mariam*, p. 61, act 4, scene 8, v. 590-595).

Moreover, Doris contradicts Mariam's belief of being innocent, because according to her, the Queen lived an adulterous relationship with Herod, and Heaven would never forgive her for such a sin: "Ay, Heav'n—your beauty cannot bring you thither,/ Your soul is black and spotted, full of sin:/ You in adult'ry lived nine year together,/ And Heav'n will never let adult'ry in."[105] This is pretty much associated with the catholic faith, which did not recognize divorce as legitimate. As a result, Mariam and Herod's relationship was, actually, not only illegitimate but also an example of adultery, being, thus, a sin. In fact, her pain for being replaced by another woman is clearly depicted when she condemns and curses both the Queen and her son, but not the King:

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[104] *The Tragedy of Mariam*, p. 61, act 4, scene 8, v. 582-585.
[105] Idem, p. 61, act 4, scene 8, v. 574-577.

> These thrice three years have I with hands held up,/ And bowe`d knees fast naile`d to the ground,/ Besought for thee the dregs of that same cup,/ That cup of wrath that is for sinners found./ And now thou art to drink it: Doris' curse/ Upon thyself did all this while attend,/ But now it shall pursue thy children worse. [...] (*The Tragedy of Mariam*, p. 62, act 4, scene 8, v. 596-602).

> Had I ten thousand tongues, and ev'ry tongue Inflamed with poison's power, and steeped in gall:/ My curses would not answer for my wrong,/ Though I in cursing the employed them all./ Hear thou that didst Mount Gerizim command,/ To be a place whereon with cause to curse:/ Stretch thy revenging arm, thrust forth thy hand,/ And plague the mother much: the children worse./ Throw flaming fire upon the baseborn heads/ That were begotten in unlawful beds./ But let them live till they have sense to know/ What 'tis to be in miserable state:/ Then be their nearest friends their overthrow,/ Attended be they by suspicious hate./ And, Mariam, I do hope this boy of mine/ Shall one day come to be the death of thine. (*The Tragedy of Mariam*, p. 62, act 4, scene 8, v. 608-623).

As a result, by analyzing the interaction between the female characters in *The Tragedy of Mariam*, it can be observed how Cary "demonstrates the mutually destructive potential of female homosocial bonds in the face of masculine oppression."[106] In other words, once their subjection to men makes it almost impossible for them to resist such oppression, they drain their frustration and anger, by being violent and oppressive to other women. In a system that is centralized in the figure of men who are authoritarian, inconsistent and arbitrary, women acting against each other, as observed with Salome, always result in impunity. Thus, Elizabeth Cary seems to call attention to her female readers in relation to their incorporation of the misogynist discourse, which makes it impossible for them to create a counter-universe which would oppose the male-oriented and dominated order. As seen in the play, instead of uniting forces, each female character acts alone while trying to subvert the tyrannical reality they live in. In this regard, by creating this fictional scenario, Cary could find mechanisms to comment on her society, which means her play is an instrument of social analysis. As a result, once

[106] MILLER, Naomi J. *Changing the Subject: Mary Wroth and Figurations of Gender in Early Modern England*, 1996, p.367.

again, it becomes evident that the Closet Drama functioned as a means for women to incorporate their views about the early modern period realm.

3.3- Graphina

There seem to be in *The Tragedy of Mariam* metatheatrical/metadramatic moments, which poses some reflections upon the structure of the Closet Drama, demonstrating its relation within the seventeenth century context and also elucidating the artistic as well as political potential of this genre. The previous section made some comments regarding this feature, especially with the analogy between Salome and the subversive potential of the Closet Drama. However, in this final moment of close reading, it will be proposed an interpretation for the female character Graphina, which is paradigmatic for the metatheatrical aspect. The choice for her to be studied apart from the other women is justified on behalf of two aspects: i- she does not engage in the same pattern of social interaction as the others female characters, having only one speech that is proclaimed to her beloved Pheroras; and ii- she is not present in the original version of the legend, which is the source for the play, indicating that Elizabeth Cary, either invented or at least changed her name.

For many literary critics, Graphina's silence is seen as the embodiment and also a reinforcement of the ideals associated with female speech: she, contrary to the other women, knows her place and acts virtuously, by not engaging in public discourse. Such an interpretation is done based on the traditional perspective of the seventeenth century that, as we have often mentioned, had gender constructions in which speech was, directly, associated with sexual looseness for women. As a result, being a dynamic pair, silence was deemed as the ideal behavior, guaranteeing male control and authority over female figures. This ideology, however, establishes a manacheistic approach not only for the early modern period standards of female conduct but also for the way contemporaneity has been reading it. That happens because "the bodies and minds of women in particular have long been regulated and shaped by systems of discourse which serve the interests of male-dominated culture."[107] As a matter of fact, feminist criticism has tended to play by the same rules as the seventeenth century society while reading speech as "a privileged site of authority",[108] whereas silence is understood as "a site of gendered oppression".[109] For instance, Belsey believes that "subjectivity is associated with

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[107] LUCKYJ, Christina. *'A Moving Rhetoricke': Gender and Silence in Early Modern England*, 2002, p. 5.
[108] Idem, p. 8.
[109] Ibidem, p. 8.

speech and silence negates the subjectivity briefly accorded to women through speech."[110]

On the one hand, it is undeniable that in our study of Mariam we did emphasize her attempt to construct her subjectiveness as not only being apart but also independent from the figure of Herod. During this process, Mariam's speech is indeed an important tool for her to claim and conquer such a status. On the other hand, we have likewise dedicated some time trying to elucidate that her choice to stay silent, instead of arguing for her innocence, was responsible for establishing her as a martyr, making the readers take her side, feeling empathetic for her. Consequently, we attempted to demonstrate that her silence was an act of courage, resistance, and honesty that detached her, once for all, from Herod, who used his speech, constantly, as a way to reinforce his power, oppressing everyone during his tyrannical rule. Additionally, while the Queen kept herself silent, the readers could also accompany the King getting into a spiral of destructive madness, depicted by his confused speech, which made him incapable of taking the right decisions. In a way, then, the lack of speech on account of Mariam is likewise an example of how silence could revert patriarchal authority over women. That is, once she did not speak, the absence of control and subjugation of the Queen to her husband is increased, which means she achieved her subjectiveness and, consequently, he lost control over her actions, decisions, and speech —respectively pointing out that her body, and mind were no longer absorbed and obliterated by Herod—.

Moreover, as we have also stated during our analysis of the Chorus, the King's final choice for Mariam's murder is not only a consequence of him being misguided by Salome's speech, which could be seen as similar to the serpent in the bible, but also as his final attempt to reestablish control over his wife. It is noticeable that, for being an authoritarian ruler and a man, Herod had the right to be arbitrarily violent with any citizen, and mainly, with his wife. Therefore, within this context it can be observed how silencing operates, simultaneously, as a support and problematization of the masculine anxiety and desire for female silence. In other words, by ensuring that Mariam was punished for her public speech, and making her silent for eternity, there is an endorsement of the traditional *status quo*. Moreover, the physical punishment suffered by Mariam is likewise a warning and instruction for

[110] LUCKYJ, Christina. *'A Moving Rhetoricke': Gender and Silence in Early Modern England*, p. 69.

other women, who should avoid committing the same mistake. Nevertheless, once Mariam's death seems to lack poetic justice, inviting the readers to feel empathetic for her, there is a critique to Herod's attitude, which works as a metonymic representation of how every man felt towards female verbal abundance. That was the first indication of silence working as a means to both transgress and undermine the traditional perspective that associated speech with subjectivity and silence with obedience to patriarchal authority.

In this section, we will argue that Graphina reinforces and enlarges the above-mentioned proposition. For this purpose, it is necessary to, initially, demonstrate why we do not agree with the first feminist readings of her as endorsing the subordination of women. The arguments for that hypothesis are, mainly, two. First of all, it was considered that the only moment in which Graphina speaks happens in the context of a private exchange between her and Pheroras, the man who will later be her husband. Faced with that, it could be mooted that this female character does not challenge the oppressive order, after all, she obeys the prescriptive conduct for women. Secondly, the reason that motivates her speech is the fact that Pheroras, precisely, asks —if not commands— her to speak. In a way, then, not only does she speak according to the standard that determined women to confine their thoughts to their husbands but she is also obedient to Pheroras' authority. His previous lines were telling Graphina about Herod's death, which was a circumstance that would allow them to get married. However, since the woman was in silence, Pheroras was reading this as a sign of 'discontent': "Why speaks thou not, fair creature?/ Move thy tongue,/ For silence is a sign of discontent:/ It were to both our loves too great a wrong/ If now this hour do find thee sadly bent."[111] Thus, it is only after his request that Graphina, finally, shares her thoughts:

> Mistake me not, my lord, too oft have I/ Desired this time to come with winge`d feet,/ To be enrapt with grief when 'tis too nigh./ You know my wishes ever yours did meet:/ If I be silent, 'tis no more but fear/ That I should say too little when I speak:/ But since you will my imperfections bear,/ In spite of doubt I will my silence break:/ Yet might amazement tie my moving tongue,/ But that I know before Pheroras' mind./ I have admired your affection long:/ And cannot yet therein a reason find./ Your hand hath lifted me from lowest

[111] *The Tragedy of Mariam*, p. 22, act 2, scene 1, v. 41-44.

> state,/ To highest eminency wondrous grace,/ And me your handmaid have you made your mate,/ Though all but you alone do count me base. You have preserved me pure at my request,/ Though you so weak a vassal might constrain force/ To yield to your high will; then last not best,/ In my respect a princess you disdain;/ Then need not all these favors study crave,/ To be requited by a simple maid?/ And study still, you know, must silence have./ Then be my cause for silence justly weighed,/ But study cannot boot not I requite,/ Except your lowly handmaid's steadfast love/ And fast obedience may your mind delight, firm/ I will not promise more than I can prove. (*The Tragedy of Mariam*, p. 22, act 2, scene 1, v. 45-72).

To start with, regarding the excerpt above, it is interesting to note that the interpretation of silence as discontentment is also shared by Herod, after he returns home, and Mariam does not say anything: "And here she comes indeed: happily met,/My best and dearest half: what ails my dear?/ Thou dost the difference certainly forget disparity/'Twixt dusky habits and a time so clear/."[112] Although in this second case Mariam confirms that his reading was precisely correct, the fact that Graphina denies being unhappy with the news, demonstrates that there are many ways of interpreting women's silence, instead of always assuming it as a sign of chastity, obedience, and virtuosity. In other words, "there is a difference between being silent, and being silenced, that silence can be used for different purposes and read in different ways by different audiences."[113] Moreover, since Pheroras can not understand the meaning of her silence, it is likewise perceivable that this is a powerful tool: by not being able to comprehend her intentions, Pheroras no longer had control over Graphina. Consequently, her silence and performativity placed this man at an "informational disadvantage",[114] which ultimately will lead him to ask her to explain herself to him. As a result, once he can not label her, this female character, like Mariam, was able to construct her own subjectiveness without being absorbed and obliterated by a man.

Additionally, when she speaks she not only proves her beloved to be mistaken but also contradicts what the scholars had argued. That is, rather than being silent because Graphina deemed it to be the duty of a virtuous woman, she emphasizes that such an action is a consequence of her lack of knowledge, after all, she came

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[112] *The Tragedy of Mariam*, p. 45, act 4, scene 3, v. 87-90.
[113] LUCKYJ, Christina. *'A Moving Rhetoricke': Gender and Silence in Early Modern England*, 2002, p. 7.
[114] NESLER, Miranda. *Closethed Authority in The Tragedy of Mariam*, 2012, p. 364.

from a lower social class. This is also an example of a metatheatrical passage once, as we had previously discussed, the closet drama was an advent that allowed only women from the elite, which could have access to education, to write. As a consequence, it can be noted that the subversion of the order was an achievement of fewer females, being also an exclusive and excluding process. In fact, the idea that the law could be surpassed by the members of the elite is something mentioned by Salome, when she claims for her right to divorce: “The law was made for none but who are poor”.[115] Faced with that, it can be concluded that there are different layers that interfere with women becoming more independent and being able to achieve their rights. To put into practical terms, we can observe the intersectionality in which the social, gender, power, racial, and economic aspects become more complex once they are intertwined. The interconnection of these different matters is responsible for determining which groups are disadvantaged or privileged. Therefore, individuals from the same group, for example, women could suffer more or less from the male domination and patriarchal control.

In the play, it gets clear that Salome is the one who manages to benefit the most from the system, since she can take advantage of her position, placing the other female characters, specially Mariam, unto the brutal constraints of the male-dominated society. As a result, intersectionality also plays a major role in determining the interactions between women, or in Graphina’s case the total absence of such a feature. In the context of a hierarchical and phallocentric society, those who were marginalized could only achieve some advantages by using their relatively privileged position and oppressing the rest of the subjects who belonged to that group. Thus, the lack of dialogues between Graphina and other female characters could be comprehended as her feeling inferior, which considering the tendency among women to repress each other, enlarged her insecurities. In other words, even if there was a hierarchical relationship between Mariam, Salome, and Doris, those women were still from the same social class. As a matter of fact, in Graphina’s lines, it is noticeable that, for being from a lower position than Pheroras, she feared her speech would not have the proper rhetoric construction, or else be inadequate: “If I be silent, ’tis no more but fear/ That I should say too little when I

[115] *The Tragedy of Mariam*, p. 13, act 1, scene 4, v. 312.

speak:/ But since you will my imperfections bear,/ In spite of doubt I will my silence break".[116]

Although Graphina's lines justify her silence on account of short knowledge, this can also be understood as an attempt to hide the rhetorical and transgressive aspect of a woman being silent. To put into other words, this explanation seems to contribute to the perception of Graphina as a pure, dignified, and obedient female character, who is aware of the duties associated with her gender and her social class. However, during her speech, there is the destabilization of Pheroras' power and authority, which means she is the one in control of their interaction, undermining the male domination. One could argue that the only reason why there is a conversation between these two characters is because Pheroras requires his beloved to speak. Despite being true, there is an irony in a man asking a woman to break her silence once he is, simultaneously, even if temporarily, breaking the ideology about women's conduct as well as suspending the moral code about speech. Moreover, by practically begging for Graphina to explain herself and demonstrate her feelings, Pheroras puts himself in a very fragile and vulnerable position, contradicting the manly behavior of always being brave, strong, and imposing. Additionally, the confirmation that Pheroras is wrong,[117] which means he is unable to read Graphina, increases his subordination to her: he needs her to tell, exactly, how she feels. Consequently, there is a problematization of the traditional order once the "patriarchal judgment relies on the ability to read a woman's behavior",[118] and Pheroras seems to lack this quality since he needs Graphina's input to be able to comprehend her properly.

On the other hand, during Graphina's lines, it is also indicated that, contrary to her beloved, she was completely aware of Pheroras' feelings, thoughts, and intentions: "But that I know before Pheroras' mind/ I have admired your affection long".[119] This statement enhances Graphina's superiority, after all, she constructs an image of herself as not only humble and honest but also as smart while being able to read Pheroras. In a way, then, similarly to what happens in the comedies, there seems to be an inversion of the roles with Graphina being both wiser and also more

[116] *The Tragedy of Mariam*, p. 22, act 2, scene 1, v. 51-52.
[117] This is clearly stated by Graphina in her lines: "Mistake me not, my lord" (p. 22, act 2, scene 1, v. 45).
[118] NESLER, Miranda. *Closethed Authority in The Tragedy of Mariam*, 2012, p. 363.
[119] *The Tragedy of Mariam*, p. 22, act 2, scene 1, v. 54-55.

self-confident, commanding the dialogue and the whole relationship. As a matter of fact, these ideas are expressed by the female character who demonstrates her appreciation for Pheroras affection. That is, he loved her so dearly that he would choose her over any princess; bore her imperfections; and, most important, had preserved her pure, over her "request".[120] Considering the patriarchal system that placed ultimate authority to men, being women marginalized, and the social differences between Pheroras and Graphina, he had, in many ways, the legitimate right to have sexual intercourse with her. However, she explicitly indicates that, because of her request, they did not, which shows how he respected her decision, but also how she had control over her body. Nonetheless, although it could be argued that this conduct increased her chastity, it also stands to reason that Graphina overthrew the female expectation of obedience and complacency by refusing to have a more intimate relation with Pheroras.

Additionally, Graphina is also in charge of her mind and thoughts, which makes her able to redefine both her and Pheroras' roles in their conversation. First of all, by taking a look at his speech, before he evokes Graphina's participation, Pheroras tries to establish a boundary that would not allow this female character to exceed the verbal dexterity. He does this by initiating a sonnet, which is grounded in a literary tradition that places gender hierarchy, besides also being used to tell the couples' love story. One example of that is the sonnet from Romeo and Juliet, in which he tries to convince her to kiss him, and it is finally successful at the end. However, differently from this passage which has a more equal division of the stanzas, Pheroras initiates the sonnet making usage of eighth lines:

> Else had I been his equal in love's host,/ For though the diadem on Mariam's head/ Corrupt the vulgar judgments, I will boast/ Graphina's brow's as white, her cheeks as red./ Why speaks thou not, fair creature? Move thy tongue,/ For silence is a sign of discontent:/ It were to both our loves too great a wrong/ If now this hour do find thee sadly bent./ (*The Tragedy of Mariam*, p. 22, act 2, scene 1, v. 37-44).

[120] *The Tragedy of Mariam*, p. 22, act 2, scene 1, v. 61.

As it is known, the traditional sonnet is composed by three quatrain stanzas and a rhyming couplet (ABAB CDCD EFEF GG). As a consequence, if Pheroras started with eighth lines, then it only lasted for Graphina one stanza and the rhyming couplet. This is a visual demonstration of the literary boundary placed by Pheroras as a way to curtail Graphina's liberty to speak and express her thoughts as well as emotions. Faced with that, it can be observed how, despite asking for female speech, Pheroras does that by trying to keep the situation under his control, which once again points out to female outspokenness and free speech as generating male anxiety. Moreover, it is likewise perceivable that, in his speech, Pheroras places himself as the subject, that is, the poet, whereas Graphina is the object to which he refers to and describes. Within this discursive organization, is the subordination of women to men, both through language and as a result of the patriarchal ideology of the time. Based on this structure, we can comprehend the idea previously mentioned of the sonnet establishing a gender hierarchy that is representative of the inner social reality of the seventeenth century once the 'poet' and the subject is a male character, while there is the objectification of the female participant. Yet, by demanding Graphina's participation, Pheroras gives her a powerful tool to change this situation, after all, she was integrating the production by both speaking and writing their love story. Under this regard, we can notice another exemplification of a metadramatic moment since this procedure depicted in the play is similar to the context of what happened within the closet drama: "female closet authors might claim closet authority and covertly share (or usurp) authority from their male counterparts."[121]

The fact that Graphina's answer to Pheroras does not follow the pattern of a traditional sonnet, since she uses twenty-seven lines, indicates that there is a transgression that reframes their performative and social roles. Nevertheless, it is important to mention that, despite outnumbering the verses that were expected by Pheroras and, probably, the readers, she maintains the rhyming scheme. This feature along with her constantly apologizing for her silence, which works as an excuse for her extremely long speech, seem to cover her transgressive attitude. As a result, even if she redesigns the structure of the sonnet, and also becomes the main writer and/or poet of her and Pheroras' story, she does that by protecting herself

[121] NESLER, Miranda. *Performing Silence, Performing Speech: Genre and Gender in Stuart Drama*, 2009, p. 57.

under this cover of proclaiming a harmless speech. In fact, her lines, oftentimes, renew that her silence was not only in accordance with the conduct prescriptions of the seventeenth century society but also that, by breaking this rule and finally speaking, she was easing Pheroras' anxiety and insecurity towards her feelings. By promoting an explanation for her excessive speech, Graphina was, simultaneously, protecting herself and undermining the male-dominated system. That is, while presenting a justification for silence, which made her, once again, readable for Pheroras, Graphina was demonstrating her superiority in relation to that man. Additionally, she emphasizes that, once her beloved had completely misread her, there was a contradiction in the silence conduct, after all, if women were never to speak, then male control could be in trouble because of their lack of ability to read female performativity and intentions.

In other words, to have ultimate control over any subject it is necessary for the person in charge to have a certain level of knowledge upon it. As a result, while silence could be read as a sign of modesty and obedience, it also was capable of increasing male's anxiety. For, as it is indicated by Graphina, by choosing to remain silent women could both obfuscate and hide their true inner selves and aspirations, leading men to a limited access to her external information. The danger is that, through disguise, the internal constitution of a woman may not be exactly matching with what she demonstrates, putting male domination and authority in challenge. In fact, as we have often mentioned, in the tragedies, many women were victims of their husbands' deafness, and misconceptions of their attitudes, for instance, Desdemona, and even Mariam. There seems to be, then, a contradiction in which, by remaining silent and following the prescriptive conduct, women had their thoughts more oblique, making it harder for men to control them:

> Operating within the directive "be and seem," a woman may either seem what she is, or she may manipulate external cues to separate the two so that "seeming" obscures her interiority; in either case, she participates in actively shaping a representation of herself and her gender role. (NESLER, Miranda. *Performing Silence, Performing Speech: Genre and Gender in Stuart Drama*, 2009, p. 19)

In light of the excerpt above, it can be concluded that silence was a powerful tool for women to create their own subjectiveness and claim self-authority towards

their untouchable and unreadable inner self, while simultaneously claiming to be obedient to the *status quo*. Faced with that, Graphina can be understood as a character that, apparently, plays by the rules of her time, while actually challenging such conceptions. This results in a "disruptive compliance",[122] something that is also done by the authors in the closet plays. In other words, as section 3 indicates, this genre is dichotomic in many ways, mainly as a result of the ambiguous and unstable socio-political context of that period. For many critics, the closet drama, by being distant from stage, allowed women to directly reflect, comment, and also criticize their marginalization when it comes to public and theatrical participation. Nevertheless, the first subversive aspect of this genre is that it could easily be adjusted to small performances at the households. Thus, despite being considered an isolated activity that happened in the private space of the closet, it is known that many women were able to open this place by inviting their friends to read and even perform the play together. According to the amount of people, it was possible to divide the female participants into the characters, portraying both men and women, and even in a small audience. Furthermore,

> Even in the absence of such company, however, the closet reader was never alone because she was always in the presence of the author (via his/her words) and an imagined readerly community; thus the space was never wholly private. (NESLER, 2009, p. 9).

The quotation above indicates how powerful and didactic the closet plays were once they represented the entrance of female playwrights, even if silently, into other women's closets, being able to introduce them to the absolute novelty of a portrayal of their society through the eyes of someone who share the same gender, and most likely, the same experiences as them. Those literary productions, hence, could shape their female readers views, and, by elucidating the power of silence as not only a rhetoric but also a manipulative tool to disguise and protect women's intentions, they were likewise instructing and inviting those females to do the same. As a result, we can conclude that Graphina's lines and also her silence, working as a powerful mechanism to destabilize and generate insecurities in Pheroras,

[122] NESLER, Miranda. *Performing Silence, Performing Speech: Genre and Gender in Stuart Drama*, 2009, p. 1.

demonstrate that she was in command of their relationship. Thus, there is a change in the gender ideology and in the prescription associated with both men and women. Under this light, if, for the early modern period, the biggest danger expressed by the female tongue was its ability to usurp the patriarchal prerogative of gender construction, now silence was likewise working as a rhetorical tool, being able to undermine masculine power, authority, and shift, even if temporarily, the gender hierarchy. That happens, moreover, because the "notion of silence as a powerful rhetoric in itself and an alternative form of eloquence can be traced back to classical sources and is just as frequently gendered male".[123] In the play, although silence is attributed to a female character, which would be considered as normal, the meaning it evokes is associated to male's silence:

> As early as Plato silence was associated with truth, wisdom and eloquence; later, in the hands of neo-Stoics and recusants, silence became a recommended form of strength and defiance literalised in the rejection of the ex officio oath in Tudor England. As an expression of open defiance silence could thus become rhetoric parallel to speech. In addition silence was increasingly associated in early modern England with the unreadable, 'inscrutable', private subject who can not be fathomed or decoded. (LUCKYJ, 2002, p. 7).

As a matter of fact, regarding that the early modern period, during the seventeenth century, is marked by the Humanist and Renaissance movement, which had the Ancients Greek and Latin as primer inspiration for culture, the idea of silence as rhetoric is a possibility:

> Notably, this is a practice that numerous early modern male characters employ to protect themselves and disturb the control of hegemonic groups. Not only does Iago undermine Venetian authority by refusing to disclose his motives in Othello—"From this time forth I never will speak word" (5.2.356)—but Hieronimo bites out his own tongue in The Spanish Tragedy so that he might not share information with the king. Yet, critics often look to such resulting masculine silence as active. (NESLER, 2009, p. 3).

[123] LUCKYJ, Christina. *'A Moving Rethoricke': Gender and Silence in Early Modern England*, 2002, p. 1.

The interpretation of Graphina's silence as a rhetoric and also an alternative discourse for women is furthermore increased by the fact that Elizabeth Cary was a member from the elite educated during Elizabeth I's rule, which means she had access to Latin education, being in contact with such features described above. As a result, it can be mooted that Graphina's silence functioned as a rhetorical movement, departing from its traditional meaning of subordination, while working in a subtle way of subverting this pattern, increasing the female power of seduction. This demonstrates that silence, as many other features we have previously mentioned, was also dichotomic. To put into other words, it "could function not only as an emblem of the virtuously sealed female body but also as a powerful tool and often ambiguous rhetorical tool, rendering unreadable seemingly silent women, such as Graphina".[124] Faced with that, it can be observed how Elizabeth Cary appears to include this female character in the play as an attempt to elucidate a different or even alternative example of both feminine communication and rebellion from the patriarchal discourse.

Indeed, Graphina is often unregarded in the analysis of the play, mainly, because the literary critiques, as the Chorus from this tragedy, tend to focus on the outspokenness of the other female characters, as we also discussed: Mariam, Salome, Doris, and Alexandra. In a way, it could be argued that Graphina is overshadowed by these women. However, it should be also noted that her silence offered a significant alternative to speech in the process of guaranteeing female agency and emancipation. Thus, rather than running with a public voice, getting into the very same male-dominated culture that imprisoned women, the most challenging mechanism of fighting oppression was to shift the conception of silence as impotence. In other words, even if the female characters could transgress the system, they would do it by using a language that was not created by them. Moreover, another danger of entering into public discourse was that, as it is exemplified by Mariam, women became too exposed, being an easy target for criticism and punishment. That is:

> On the one hand feminine silence appears to offer no meaningful point of entry into literary history. On the other hand, as soon as woman uses language, she can be defined and controlled. To return to Fletcher, a woman

[124] LARSON, Katherine. *Early Modern Women in Conversation,* 2015, p. 34.

> who speaks in early modern culture can hardly be described as an independent being, if in speaking she enters male discourse only to be simultaneously labeled a whore. (LUCKYJ, 2002, p. 6).

Despite disagreeing that by using a language created by men women were, necessarily, enclosed and unable to claim for their subjectiveness, this quotation is relevant once it depicts that there are more nuances involved in the manacheistic duality of speech and silence. In fact, throughout our analysis of Mariam and Salome, we aimed to elucidate how subversive was their attempt to make use of language, in a male-centered culture, to claim for their rights. After all, they demonstrated, exactly, what many feminist critics had argued in favor of female speech. That is, “what we need is a woman's writing that works within ‘male’ discourse but works ceaselessly to deconstruct it: write what can not be written”.[125] Accordingly, as we have often renewed, the novelty of closet drama was the allowance of a continuum that made it possible for female playwrights to bring a new perspective about the seventeenth century society, and the issues faced by women. Such a thing would have never been achieved if they did not take part in the language, disrupting this structure. Within the nuances, the female characters had to deal with the intersectionality, which means that while Salome had a happy ending, Mariam suffered a different fate on account of her verbal abundance. By this opposition, Elizabeth Cary not only indicates the instability of the seventeenth century norms, which did not judge women based on the same solid common ground, but also warns her readers that they could be victims of this arbitrary and flawed system. In light of this, the possibility of Graphina representing an alternative, and perhaps more secure example of resistance is increased, after all, she performs in a way that guarantees her safety once she maintains Pheroras illusion of having the control and authority over her.

It is under this assumption that we can identify another metadramatic aspect. Within this duality in which her silence operates as a site that engenders her agency, while destabilizing patriarchal discourse, Graphina indicates the same logic through which closet drama guarantees female playwrights to expose their thoughts without being censored. Previously, we have mentioned the first metadramatic aspect by

[125] SHOWALTER, E. *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory,* 1985, p. 254.

comparing Graphina's lower social position with other women who, like her, would not be able to insert themselves into the literary system of the seventeenth century. Nevertheless, by proposing this example, re-signifying the concept of silence, Elizabeth Cary was able to comment on the didactic function of this genre, which could include more women through the reading activity. Even if not all the feminine members of the elite decided to write plays, they could still be part of the discussion and subvert the order in an indirect way. Besides that, another metadramatic response is that Graphina mirrors Cary's role as the author of the play since she manages to orchestrate different, and often contradictory, views that undermine the already thin line between private and public, speech and silence as well as their respectively association with sexual looseness and obedience, and the patriarchal ideology.

In other words, she takes advantage of the dramatic conventions —such as the chorus— and the female characters —as Salome and Mariam— to criticize the *status quo* of her time. However, as Graphina, she does that silently, after all, she is not the one running on public speech. On the contrary, Cary makes use of the closet drama and, more than that, of writing, which was less firmly controlled and censored. Thus, in the same way Graphina is an alternative example of resistance, by reframing the meaning of silence and the gender hierarchy between her and Pheroras, so is female authorship in the closet drama, within the context of the repressive male-dominated society of early modern England. To put into other words, both Graphina and Cary —representing all the female playwrights of the closet drama— manipulated silence as a means to portray a disruptive compliance, which protected and obfuscated their critique as well as destabilization of the patriarchal authority they were circumscribed at. Moreover, focusing on the etymology of the word, Graphina derives from the Greek/Latin word *graphein*, meaning "to write". The dichotomous name, which places together writing and speaking, when this female character addresses Pheroras, demonstrates an enlargement of the dualities studied in this monograph: private and public; outspokenness and silence; agency and passivity. In a way, then, it could be argued that Graphina's fusion of spoken and written language reflects the characteristics of the closet drama genre and the stylistic approach found in Cary's writings. Other scholars have go even more deep in this association:

> "[L]ike the young Cary, Graphina has begun a serious course of study to acquire the knowledge she needs to express herself as she would like in speech and also, presumably, in writing, because Graphina's name puns on the Greek word graphesis for writing as a silent form of speech. Hence Graphina is less a foil for Mariam than a surrogate for Cary. (ILONA, 2007, p. 23).

Whether or not Graphina stands as a biographical reference to Elizabeth Cary, it is undeniable that this character, metalinguistic, demonstrates the power of Closet Drama. More than subverting the traditional ideal towards female silence, by indicating that this resource can be used as a resistance to male-domination, Graphina is an example of private speech that, nevertheless, resonates with the public debate that is placed throughout the play. As a result, her statements can transcend the private dialogue, through intertextuality both with the rest of the play, and the social reality outside it. Additionally, by making use of both speech and silence that are calculated, this female character is able to dissimulate, creating a mismatch between what she shows (exterior/performativity) and who she really is (interiority). This seems to mirror the mechanism that is used not only by Elizabeth Cary but also other female writers of Closet Drama, after all, only within a close reading —as we had to do with Graphina— we are able to comprehend the transgressive, subversive and, yet, subtle power of this genre. In a way, not only the female authors and Graphina but also this dramatic genre share the characteristics of being placed as peripheral. As we have tried to elucidate, the main reason for that is the male-dominated culture, which placed the gender ideology, positioning women always as marginalized to the social realm. Nevertheless, with *The Tragedy of Mariam,* Cary problematizes how women could cross the unstable boundaries created by their society, in a silent way, avoiding critiques and punishments.

Faced with that, both the idea of silence and the closet seem to be paradigmatic of the thin line between private and public, once they created a safe place for women to express their opinion, while addressing, interfering, and assuming control over a narrative that criticized and escaped the patriarchal constraints. Hence, it can be concluded that Elizabeth Cary manages to subvert the order and, simultaneously, teach her readers to do the same, while also instructing

them how to keep themselves protected from the social and physical punishments originated from female public speech.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

This monograph intended to analyze how the female writers could subvert the traditional patriarchal order, by subscribing their perspective upon their society, through the writing of Closet Drama. For that matter, the initial part of this research, dealt with a brief introduction regarding the sociohistorical aspects of the early modern period. Additionally, it was also important to take a look at Elizabeth Cary's biography in order to understand that, despite being a revolutionary moment for English Literature, as with almost all socio historical processes which are excluding, only women from the elite could take part in this novelty. Our main focus was to demonstrate how the historic events play a major role in shaping the values, ideologies and, thus, the hegemonic culture of a certain society. We decided to focus on the change from the sixteenth to seventeenth century, during the reigns of Elizabeth I and King James, precisely, because this is considered to be the Golden Age of English Literature. However, instead of emphasizing the canonical productions of the male writers, such as Shakespeare, we wanted to elucidate and give recognition to an important female writer who is often disregarded. Along with that, *The Tragedy of Mariam*, our object of study, was published in 1603, that is, in the very beginning of the seventeenth century, which means that what happened in the sixteenth century had a huge influence on the perspectives that were placed in this play.

By separating our close reading into three subchapters we aimed to work on different, but equally relevant, aspects of the play. Within the Chorus, we could observe a strong resemblance between the closet drama and the traditional tragedies from Greek and Latin origin. They represented a specific and subjective point of view, from the group of Jews, which indicates that they were defending the maintenance of the *status quo*. While commenting on their judgments regarding Mariam's actions and her speech, we wanted to question its authority as well as undermine the common critique that tends to read the Chorus as mirroring Elizabeth Cary's perspective. For these scholars, Cary is not a revolutionary, but a misogynist who perpetuates the values of the patriarchal society. Contrary to this argument, we emphasized that the Chorus is not only inconsistent but also that all its judgments are, at the end, proved to be wrong. As a result, we initiated our thesis that Elizabeth Cary should be read as a proto-feminist since she questions and destabilizes the

male-dominated culture of her time. In fact, by placing a Chorus that lacks coherence, in the same way all the other male characters, most clearly illustrated with Herod, she seems to be depicting the main features from early modern England: instability, within the existence of thin boundaries, contradictions, dichotomies, and double standards. To put into practical terms, Elizabeth Cary, problematizes male's authority in discourse once she shows that, many times, they are both misinterpreting or actively deceiving as a means to keep their power and the gender hierarchy.

Indeed, Herod and Constabarus exemplify the act of using speech, regardless of having a commitment with the truth. Similarly, the Chorus —and, once again, again Herod— have an inconsistent and contradictory reading of Mariam. On the one hand, they seem to play by the early modern period rule, associating her speech with sexual looseness. On the other hand, they, many times, admire the good character and virtuosity of this female character, departing from the traditional and conservative view they had, previously, defended. The fluctuation, however, ends within the final decision of Herod to murder Mariam: for disrespecting the ideal of wife's conduct, she needed to be punished, as a way to constrain her transgression, and to serve as a warning for other women. Yet, despite this message being clear, those who read the play closely can understand that both Herod's final statements and the Chorus' ode indicate regret, reinforcing the idea that Mariam was, actually, a victim of the men's right to be arbitrarily violent. By the same token, we also depicted that other female characters, mainly the ones from the tragedies, were likewise examples of what both female silence and speech can cause in men. While those plays aimed to endorse a certain conduct and moral appraisal regarding the female characters, they ended up, simultaneously, lacking poetic justice. As a result, male discourse as well as their actions were grounded in their abuse of power, violence, and the need to objectify and repress women, in order to keep such a system.

Faced with that, in some moments we highlighted the similarities between Mariam and Desdemona, who are both victims of their husbands jealousy and insecurity, being those features increased by other characters, respectively, Salome and Iago. The big novelty in *The Tragedy of Mariam*'s plot is that the one responsible for plotting against Mariam is another female character, which stands as reason to the patriarchal system putting women against each other, with a total absence of sorority. The perversion of a gender hierarchical system, as patriarchalism, is that it

empties the possibility of those who are oppressed to envision a different form of political and social organization once they can not stand as a group. This is the biggest weapon that guarantees the maintenance of such a political organization. While women are constantly oppressed and anulated by other men, first their fathers and then their husbands, there seems to be no room for them to fight against this without suffering severe consequences as social and physical punishments. Accordingly, we argued that wedlock was, rather than the original idea placed in the comedies of a happy ending, a mechanism that assured male control over women. In fact, the idea of wedding as able to conciliate the social and gender issues, overcoming all the adversities placed in the context of a literary piece which mirrored the society, later became a common feature of the first british novels. If in real life such a resolution was not possible, at least in fiction, the writers could advocate for a peaceful society without the class and gender fights.

In the seventeenth century, the ideal space for women was the domestic sphere, which means they were apart from political decisions and social life. This division placed, apparently, strict social and gender roles for both men and women that embedded a moral and ethical code. In other words, as we have often stated, females' bodies and minds were likewise enclosed to their husbands' authorities once they were responsible for making the important decisions. Faced with that, if women did not engage in the public realm, education was deemed as not only unnecessary but also dangerous. This notion, however, was not a general agreement. We observed that, during Elizabeth's rule, women could benefit from the classical education, mainly, because the Queen herself advocated for the right of female members from the elite to be educated. In fact, that was a common feature along the Tudor Era. Nevertheless, within King James I's rule there was a brutal change. For this authoritarian figure believed both in his divine right to control the country and in witchcraft, always associated with women. His fear of magic and the exacerbated religiosity made him deny his own daughter, and thus every other woman, access to classical education.

Elizabeth Cary was one of the women who lived during the Elizabethan era, being, therefore, educated. She wrote *The Tragedy of Mariam*, probably, in the final years of her rule, and in the beginning of King James I ascension. This female writer went through a difficult process because, despite being from the elite, she had issues in her marriage: the death of her first daughter; the divorce; and her mother in

law prohibiting her from reading. Yet, in face of these adversities, Cary could take advantage of the dramatic genre, Closet Drama, to place a critique on her society. Although we did not intend to subscribe her play, exclusively, to the biographical events of her life, it is undeniable that the female characters —Mariam, and Salome— claim for divorce resembles Elizabeth Cary's past situation. Within the social and political context of the early modern period, which placed so many constraints for women, one question guided our reading of the play: How could these female figures subvert the order without being punished? After finishing the close reading section, we hope it was clear that the play itself demonstrates different ways of doing it. As a consequence, we argued that *The Tragedy of Mariam* had several metatheatrical or metadramatic moments in which the characters' lines and attitudes represented the Closet Drama's potential to portray and destabilize the social features of the seventeenth century male-oriented society.

The first aspect that worked as a means to undermine male authority, mainly with discourse, and also the idea that female speech equated sexual looseness was the Chorus. Additionally, we likewise demonstrated that Herod had a major role in depicting the association between private and public, within his wedding being a metaphor to his tyrannical rule. Under this regard, we aimed to deconstruct and also show how unstable the *status quo* from the early modern period was, which means that the gender constructions, the values, and the judgments of moral appraisal were inconsistent, just like men, as the Chorus and Herod. However, contrary to Mariam, and the other female characters that needed to act consistently and with virtuosity, the system allowed the male characters to be volatile. This is symptomatic of patriarchalism which had a double standard according not only to gender but also to other layers on account of intersectionality. This indicates that, despite being structured upon gender hierarchy, women received different treatment according to their social position. In a way, Mariam, Alexandra, Salome, and Doris are all from a nobel origin, even if there are small differences when it comes to their access to power. On the other hand, Graphina belongs to a lower social class. Does that mean that every female character has a deterministic and inescapable fate? As we attempted to portray, more than the intersectionality there is the arbitrability which guarantees men the right of being violent, abusing their power and authority. This was clearly observed with Mariam, and other female characters from the tragedies.

Nevertheless, more than arguing that the final moment of the play stands as reason to a critique to the patriarchal system, claiming more rights and justice for women, especially on account of Mariam's death lacking poetic justice, we aimed to investigate the different ways in which female characters could subvert the order. Both Mariam and Salome, the main female protagonists, functioned as an example of women running on with public voice, while manifesting their opinions, and acting upon their wills. Whereas the first woman has her speech interpreted by the rules of the early modern period, that is, as an indication of her infidelity towards Herod, Salome, who explicitly makes use of her lines to deceive, get revenge, and marry again, has a successful trajectory. In other words, while Mariam is punished because Herod needs to both reestablish his control over her and silence her claims, which could be corruptive of the system, Salome gets exactly what she wants. Since these two characters had more or less a similar position in society, it could be argued that the different ways in which the play treats their outspokenness is a sign of the arbitrariness we previously mentioned. That happens because more than having the same action, engaging in public speech, Salome is precisely making use of this tool to plot against Mariam, getting her revenge done, and also assuring that she will get married with Sohemus. Indeed, the Chorus' judgments, mainly his claim that the Queen aimed for variety, seem to be misplaced once they fit more with Salome's discourse and conduct. Although this second female character should be censored, according to the moral code of her time, she is not punished. Yet, if the reader is able to interpret the play as mirroring both Cary's society with its instability and the author's critical position, then it can understand that it is on us to condemn Salome's conduct.

By being a Closet Drama which positions multiple perspectives and arguments in relation to the gender ideology, and more specifically women's right to speak and act upon their wills, the readers have an important role. Despite creating a polyphonic play, Elizabeth Cary seems to defend one point of view that is against the misogynist system she lived in. More than condemning Salome's attitude, the readers can likewise grasp the violence and perversion of the patriarchal system: women needed to go against each other in order to achieve their goals. The male-dominated culture, even nowadays, has a powerful discourse that endorses female rivalry as a means to perpetuate male's authority. For if women can see one another as equally victims of the system, then they would be able to unite forces and

envision a different social organization, while claiming for their rights. This is demonstrated in the play by the counterexample with all female characters being extremely oppressive with each other, which means in their imaginarium creating a different *status quo* is impossible. Moreover, it also indicates that women have internalized the values from their society. That is, even if they wanted to pursue a different way of life, they still did it without thinking in the collective. As a result, not considering the big figure, they were not only weaker in relation to male's organization but also willing to be as violent with each other as men were to them. Faced with the ambiguous judgment of Mariam and Salome, we can comprehend that the double standard was a meaningful aspect of early modern England, showing both the gender hierarchy and also the inconsistency of the law, as a consequence of the ambivalent values and contradictory ideology of that period.

Additionally, Mariam and Salome are a paradigmatic example of female figures engaging in the public realm through speech, fighting and undermining male's authority. However, by treating these women differently, Elizabeth Cary shows that such an action was dangerous once there was always the possibility of censor and physical punishment. It was, then, necessary to hide the rebellion: transgress the order but in a way that women were not victims of more constraint. This is depicted by Graphina who shows that silence can be an alternative for speech, and simultaneously work as a sign of resistance. The truth of the matter is that the only way men can guarantee total control over women is by being able to comprehend and read them. Thus, silence is a powerful tool once it denies access to female interiority, generating a shortage of information for men. Moreover, as Graphina, Salome, and Mariam indicate, female figures could deceive by creating an exterior image that did not match their inner selves. Faced with that, by refusing to speak, women could not only increase male's anxiety and lack of control but also redefine the traditional idea of silence as an obedient response. This means that in the same way male's discourse can not be considered as an unproblematic site of authority neither can female speech and silence be placed as polar opposites. In other words, both Mariam and Graphina depart their speech from the idea of sexual looseness, even though the first character is still punished for that wrong assumption. In a way, then, they deconstruct the manacheistic perception of silence as endorsing male control and female chastity, whereas speech destabilizes such aspects.

Contrary to that, Elizabeth Cary elucidates that there is a difference between being silent and being silenced. Indeed, Mariam appears to represent, simultaneously, both processes. On the one hand, she chooses to be silent by refusing to either defend herself, proving her innocence, or to change her mood and act as Herod wishes. This first movement allows the readers to grasp how silence could be a transgressive tool once Mariam was resisting male's control. Additionally, the way her death is described increases this idea, after all, she not only becomes a martyr but also encourages the readers to feel empathetic towards her fatal ending. On the other hand, Herod's decision to murder his wife is, clearly, an attempt to silence her and contain the rebellion she started. To put into other words, Mariam's transgressive action of disobeying her husband was problematic both because she was a woman and on account of Herod being a tyrannical ruler. As a result, he could not show weakness or lack of control under his wife, which is one of the reasons why he decides for her death. The Queen is, thus, both in silence and, later on, silenced.

Yet, the best example of being silent as a rhetorical tool to oppose male domination and escape their attempt to enclose as well as define women is represented by Graphina. This female character uses her lower social status to justify her silence, when Pheroras asks her to speak. Besides, explaining her attitude in a way that creates a cover of false obedience, she is also able to invert the gender roles, becoming the one in charge for both the conversation and their relationship. More than once, Graphina shows that Pheroras follow her leads, for example, by keeping her virgin, which is dubious, once it is, simultaneously, in accordance with the female virtuous behavior but also portrays her disobedience while not subordinating her body to Pheroras. When Graphina breaks her silence, she does it in order to correct her beloved who was incapable of reading her. Thus, she constructs an image of herself as humble, and naive, whereas she is actually wiser than Pheroras, being able to deceive him while performing. Graphina destabilizes the male's power and authority by proclaiming twenty-seven lines, which completely changes the pattern of the sonnet initiated by Pheroras. She not only breaks a tradition of gender hierarchy which is associated with a literary aspect but also steps outside the boundary Pheroras had placed as a means to guarantee she would not be too outspoken. Despite being successful in her attempt, which means she undermines the male character control, she is not punished, in fact, she is rewarded in the play, by getting married to Pheroras, a man from an upper social class.

How does this woman escape censure and avoid the Chorus' criticism? The answer is very evident if we compare her actions with the female writers, such as Elizabeth Cary. The closet was seen as a protected space for elite women to be educated and to engage in the reading of multiple books. Considered to be separated from social and public life, there was little attention given to the activities done by women in such spaces. As a result, its disruptive potential was often disregarded and unseen. Faced with that, women could take advantage of this protected space, which was not exactly apart from society since they were able to invite their friends, and even perform the plays in front of small audiences. This put into question the privacy of both the closet and the closet genre itself, after all, even if the performances did not happen the readers were never alone: behind the play there was always the silent voice of the female author. In light of this, it can be understood how Graphina mirrors Elizabeth Cary and all other women who dare to challenge the system while also subscribing to it. In the same way silence was deemed as a virtuous behavior, the closet genre was a licensed form of drama that accepted female authorship.

Along with that, Graphina elucidated something that would endorse male's anxiety: women do not need to voice their opinions, that is, they do not need to speak in order to be heard. In other words, both her and Cary act in a disruptive compliance which allows them to criticize, destabilize and undermine the patriarchal organization. However, by creating a cover that protected their transgression, they could escape criticism and punishments. In fact, such an ability was a symptom of the seventeenth century being grounded in contradictory and unstable values that created categories which, despite believed to be opposed, were actually in a dialectic relationship: public and private; silence and speech; obedience and disobedience; and even the ideologies of gender roles —as Graphina and Salome shows— were, easily, transpassed. Hence, Elizabeth Cary placed an emphasis on the women's ability to insert themselves into the thin boundaries, being able to cross them, and achieve more independence, power, subjectiveness, and authority.

The process of writing this thesis was mind blowing because it made us realize the existence of female writers who were proto-feminists, and could both advocate for a change in the system and criticize the injustices of their society. Even if for a short period of time, the Closet Drama could suspend or at least blur the gender hierarchy and ideology that placed a boundary for women. After all, female

speech and silence, while describing the features of the early modern period, denouncing the violence and injustices suffered by the female figures, as well as claiming for women's rights, were being introduced to different audiences, inviting them to reflect about such matters. We understood the importance of having a continuum in which a woman gives voice to a female writer, being able to portray the society under a different perspective from the male-oriented culture. History is written by men, language is created by men, and so having a woman writing about her time is something revolutionary. To think that this happened in the seventeenth century, a time in which gender roles were even more central for society, calls attention to the need for scholars to review their conceptions about female writers. It is our job to give recognition to women who were as important for the Golden period of literature as any male author who receives all the credits. The Closet genre neither can nor should be regarded as a minor form of drama, specially on account of its relevance for female authorship and its consequences for contemporaneity. The fight for women's rights is definitely not recent, and figures like Elizabeth Cary have played a major role, if only for their attempt to narrate the issues faced by women in early modern England. Disregarding this genre and their authors is a process of silencing that evidence that we have not departed from patriarchal ideologies. The truth is that female speech is still considered to be dangerous, especially because it destabilizes male's authority, and increases their anxiety.

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