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The Chorus in Elizabeth Cary's 'Tragedy of Mariam'

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Abstract

This thesis examines Elizabeth Cary's use of the Chorus in The Tragedy of Mariam (pub. 1613). Imitating classical dramatists, Cary portrays the Chorus as a specific cultural group. Mariam's Chorus consists of "a company of Jews" whose commentary on the play's events is informed by its participation in patriarchal culture. The Chorus's prescriptions for wifely virtue and judgements of Mariam's moral standing frequently contain contradictions. Comparing the contradictions in the Chorus's statements with similar contradictions in early modern domestic-conduct guides, I argue that Cary uses the Chorus to interrogate patriarchal ideology. I consider Cary's employment of the Chorus in the context of the generic characteristics of closet drama, specifically in regard to the genre's interest in dialectical thought, politics, and didacticism. Closet dramas explore moral and political issues by dramatising arguments and allowing readers to draw our own conclusions. The Chorus voices a conservative perspective in the play's multivocal dialogue about women. Cary uses the Chorus to interrogate patriarchal assumptions about women's worth and place in society, a project which accords with closet drama's political impetus. The Chorus emphasises the didactic element in Mariam by offering the play as a "school of wisdom". Although the Chorus offers instructive statements on what comprises virtuous behaviour 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. I propose that the didacticism in Cary's play arises from the multiple perspectives offered. The ambiguity of the ending, for example, invites us to decide for ourselves whether Mariam's actions have been praiseworthy. Cary foregrounds the issue of critical thought by having the Chorus deliver a discourse on the importance of testing the truth of what we are told. The Chorus is also unaware of the implications

its endorsement of a critical approach have for its own prejudiced judgement of Mariam.

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Introduction

Elizabeth Cary, the author of the first English play published by a woman, was renowned in her own day for her prodigious learning. As a child, Cary taught herself French, Italian, Spanish, Hebrew, and Latin. Throughout her life, she read widely in poetry, history, and theology, and was well-known as a host of intellectual coteries. Two frequently quoted anecdotes from Cary's early years illustrate her precocious ability to see both sides of an issue and to think critically. The anonymous author of Cary's biography recounts how, at age twelve, Cary was given a copy of Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion (1536). After reading the text, Cary regaled her father, a well-respected judge, with objections to Calvin's work and pointed out the numerous contradictions inherent in his arguments (188). On another occasion, at ten years of age, Cary witnessed the trial in her father's court of a woman accused of witchcraft. The accused woman confessed to performing the acts she was charged with, but Cary thought that her confessions were the result of duress. Cary suggested a question that proved that the accused woman had confessed because she was afraid and hoped to gain leniency, and the woman was acquitted as a result (186-87).

An awareness of Cary's aptitude for critical thought can help us understand the construction of her closet drama The Tragedy of Mariam (pub. 1613). Numerous versions of the Herod and Mariam legend were produced in the early modern period, all based on material originally recorded by the Jewish historian Josephus. The events of the play take place in Jerusalem in 29 B. C. Before the play begins, Herod, the king of the Jews, has been called to Rome to answer for his past affiliation with Mark Antony, who has recently been overthrown by Octavius Caesar. A rumour that Caesar has executed Herod has consequently reached Jerusalem. Cary's play opens with a monologue in which Mariam describes her ambivalent reaction to the news of her husband's death. She is angry because she knows that Herod had selfishly

commanded that she be executed in the event of his death, an order which was revealed to her by Herod's servant Sohemus. Yet she grieves because she feels that Herod's love for her was genuine. When Herod unexpectedly returns from Rome alive, Mariam refuses to hypocritically feign happiness. Herod assumes that her cold reception of him is evidence that she has been unfaithful in his absence. He bases this conclusion on the fact that Mariam and Sohemus must have conversed in order for Sohemus to betray the king's trust, interpreting Mariam's speech as a sign of sexual infidelity. Herod has Mariam detained and agonises over her presumed unfaithfulness, vacillating between frenzied love and jealousy-inspired hatred. Finally, goaded by his sister Salome, he commands Mariam's execution. Mariam meets her death with calm dignity, satisfied with the moral rectitude of her refusal to dissemble. Herod immediately repents his rash deed, and acknowledges that Mariam was chaste.

Cary uses the Herod and Mariam legend as a framework in which to explore moral and political issues. She dramatises a variety of conflicting viewpoints, inviting readers to scrutinise the arguments critically and to draw our own conclusions. For example, the characters in Mariam offer various different perspectives on what comprises virtuous behaviour in a woman. Mariam believes that she is virtuous because she refuses to compromise her moral principles by taking advantage of Herod's love for her as a means to regain his favour when she has displeased him. Constabarus confirms Mariam's moral standing when he delivers a tirade in which he condemns women as evil, but exalts Mariam as the only virtuous woman who has ever existed. Herod executes Mariam because he cannot distinguish between virtue and behaviour which is understood to be a manifestation of virtue. The Chorus, described in the quarto as "a company of Jews", criticises Mariam for failing to conform to its ideas about wifely virtue. Yet at the time of her death, the imagery associated with Mariam presents her as a type of Christ, suggesting that she is virtuous despite the Chorus's criticism of her.

The dialectical construction of the play resists readers' attempts to identify a single voice as the expression of the author's personal opinion. Depending on their assumptions about where authorial sympathies lie, critics have variously presented Cary as misogynist, as proto-feminist, or as ambivalent about women's worth and place in society. I believe that we should be cautious about assuming that Cary sympathises with any one character or group of characters in Mariam, particularly because of the genre to which the play belongs. Closet dramas are not written for performance on the stage; rather in the early modern period they were intended to be read by an elite group of educated aristocrats. The genre provides a forum for the exploration of moral, political, and philosophical issues. Playwrights expect readers to engage intellectually with the arguments they present. The Tragedy of Mariam is a complex dialogue which encourages its readers to think critically about different perspectives.

The multiple perspectives dramatised in Mariam result in textual ambiguity. Commentators have frequently assumed that the ambiguity in the play indicates that Cary is ambivalent toward women. Tina Krontiris, for example, states that "the text's ambiguity" about Mariam's behaviour "seems to be a sign of the author's ambivalence about accommodating cultural ideas on the woman's role" (87). And Betty Travitsky suggests that "while Mariam's execution by the jealous Herod seems to be upheld by the important commentators of the play [i.e. the Chorus], the message sent by Salome's lighter fate belies this thesis and perhaps attests to Cary's own doubts" ("Husband-Murder" 187). We should be wary, however, of confusing dramatic ambiguity with authorial ambivalence, particularly because of the dialectical nature of closet drama.

The issue of multiple perspectives is particularly relevant to Cary's use of the Chorus in Mariam. The Chorus criticises Mariam for refusing to conform to the restrictions placed on women's freedom in a society which grants men powers and privileges that are denied to women. Critics who identify the Chorus's censorious words with Cary's personal beliefs conclude that Cary supports patriarchal ideology.[1]

Krontiris, for example, cites the Chorus's third ode as evidence that "Cary had internalized patriarchal attitudes and constructs of women" (88). But we should not assume that the Chorus's words are an authorial commentary on the action of the play. The quarto's *dramatis personae* characterises the Chorus as "a company of Jews": as such, the Chorus provides one viewpoint in a multivocal dialogue. Its judgement of Mariam's moral standing is informed by its participation in a patriarchal society which assumes that women are naturally inferior to men and thus should subject themselves to men's authority. Women were conceived of as property belonging to men: a wife had no social identity separate from that of her husband. The Chorus's commentary, moreover, occasionally conflicts with what actually happens in the play, leading us to question the value of the Chorus's judgement. Finally, the Chorus's prescriptions for wifely virtue are contradictory and inconsistent: for example, the Chorus counsels wives to beware of doing anything that could blemish their reputations, yet denies that they may attain public renown for their virtue. I will argue, based on similar contradictions found in early modern domestic-conduct guides, that Cary employs a contradictory and incoherent Chorus as a way of indirectly criticising the inconsistencies in seventeenth-century ideologies about women.

This thesis will consider the significance of the Chorus in The Tragedy of Mariam. In Chapter One I will provide a context in which to understand Cary's characterisation of the Chorus by briefly considering dramatists' traditional use of the chorus. Chapter Two will examine the contradictions associated with Mariam's Chorus and will note how those contradictions make the validity of its judgements questionable. The latter half of Chapter Two will compare the Chorus's ideological inconsistencies with some of the contradictions that are found in early modern domestic-conduct guides and will argue that Cary employs the Chorus to criticise the inconsistencies in early modern patriarchal ideology. In Chapter Three I will

consider Cary's use of the Chorus in relation to the generic characteristics of closet drama. The authors of closet dramas explore moral, political, and philosophical issues by dramatising conflicting viewpoints. The Chorus in Mariam voices a conservative viewpoint in the play's multivocal dialectic about women's worth and place in society. By expressing a patriarchal perspective on the action of the play, the Chorus serves as a means by which Cary can interrogate patriarchal ideology, a project which accords with closet drama's political impetus. Closet dramas typically explore the relationship between tyranny and resistance in both civic and domestic realms. Cary also employs the Chorus to foreground the didactic purpose of her play. In the final ode, the Chorus offers the play as a "school of wisdom" for future generations (V. i. 294). The Chorus has, throughout the play, offered explicitly didactic prescriptions for wifely virtue. Ironically, however, if readers view its arguments with a critical eye, we learn that patriarchal ideology is riddled with inconsistencies. In Chapter Four I will propose that Cary employs the Chorus to foreground the issue of critical thought in the play. In its second ode, the Chorus asserts that all humans are prone to errors of judgement because we tend to accept what we are told without questioning its truth. The Chorus's discourse serves to alert the reader to scrutinise the arguments made in the play with a critical eye. The Chorus's admonition that all humans are predisposed to make errors in judgement undermines the validity of its own commentary on the action of the play.

Chapter One

The Choral Tradition

There is literary precedent for Cary's characterisation of the Chorus in The Tragedy of Mariam. As a closet drama, Mariam belongs to a genre which participates in a long dramatic tradition. Closet drama is a vehicle for the intellectual exploration of moral, philosophical, and political issues. Playwrights dramatise conflicting viewpoints and expect readers to engage intellectually with the arguments that they raise. The formal characteristics of the genre are "well-suited to extended philosophical analysis or rumination" (Shannon 145). Lyrical and expository narration replaces stage action, and characters engage in stichomythic dialogue, long monologues, and soliloquies which allow them to elaborate upon their positions.

The immediate model for the authors of closet dramas was the work of Robert Garnier, a sixteenth-century French writer. Garnier had imitated the structure and subject matter of Seneca's closet dramas, although he departed from Seneca's characteristic depiction of scenes of physical atrocities. Seneca, in turn, was indebted to his predecessors, the ancient Greeks, for the structure and subject matter of his closet dramas. The authors of closet dramas thus participated in an established dramatic tradition.

In this tradition, the chorus has a specific dramatic function: to represent the culture, or a segment of the culture, in which the action of a play occurs. The chorus's interpretation of the actions of the principal characters is therefore informed by its own participation in a certain cultural milieu: it expresses the attitudes of a cultural group specific to a single time and place. The chorus, moreover, has a vested interest in the events that befall the principal characters of a play because tragic protagonists typically belong to the ruling classes. The turns of fortune which a tragic hero experiences also have an impact on the lives of the members of the chorus, whose

fortunes depend on their leader's well-being. A chorus's interpretation of principal characters' actions is neither objective nor detached, but rather is influenced by its own interests and circumstances.

The nature of the chorus in classical drama has been variously interpreted. Many contemporary critics assume that the chorus is an ideal spectator, and that it voices an author's personal opinion on the events in a play. For example, Costa claims that Seneca uses the chorus as an "ideal listener and commentator" which "moralizes in more or less general terms on a theme drawn from the action . . . . In addition, the chorus serves the practical purpose of filling up time in the action when something happens offstage" (107).[2] In classical dramas, however, choruses frequently lament the suffering that they are undergoing as a result of their immediate social or political circumstances, a fact which negates the view that choruses are detached or objective. Choruses occasionally interact with principal characters, thereby influencing the direction of a play's action. Again, this implies that choruses cannot provide objective commentary because they have an interest in the way in which the action develops. Critics who assume that choruses express authors' personal opinions find it difficult to account for the fact that choruses occasionally revise their opinions or contradict themselves. The assumption that choruses reflect authors' personal opinions is particularly problematic when authors utilise two or more choruses in a single play to voice different viewpoints on an issue. Faced with conflicting interpretations, critics frequently conclude that an author is ambivalent about the issue being considered. Gardiner suggests that "the nineteenth-century concept of the chorus as an ideal spectator, an interpreter for the audience of the dramatic events, probably derives from . . . Horace's admonition to Roman playwrights that the chorus should be a friend and advisor of the good and should be modest, just, and pious" (2). Critics may also be led to assume that choruses express authorial views because authors frequently use choruses to explore general political, philosophical, or moral issues which develop

from the specific events in a play. Gardiner notes that Sophocles, for example, was able to explore the "public and political consequences of the principals' behavior" by characterising choruses as specific cultural groups (192); without choral commentary, Sophocles' dramas would be "essentially narrow, personal tales of individuals or families" (191). But we must remember that every chorus is a specific cultural group, with its own interests and blind spots. Choruses consider philosophical issues in the context of the events they witness, and their perception of events is influenced by their material circumstances. We should therefore not assume that a chorus expresses an author's personal opinions.

The chorus of Oedipus Tyrannus illustrates Sophocles' employment of the chorus to develop the political implications of principal characters' actions. The chorus in Oedipus consists of a group of elders of the city of Thebes. Its viewpoint is that of mature male citizens who have a profound interest in the welfare of their city. The chorus does not merely comment on the action, but influences its direction. When Oedipus accuses Creon of treason, for example, the chorus advises the king to restrain himself from rashness, urging him to listen to Creon's intelligent defense of himself (34). Acting as an advocate of the accused man, the chorus reminds Oedipus that "He's never told you lies before. He's sworn. Be kind" (37). When Oedipus finally abandons his persecution of Creon, the king credits the chorus with persuading him: "Go then, let him go . . . . Yours not his the cry that breaks me" (37). Throughout the play, the chorus considers Oedipus's personal history as it affects the fortune of the state; in doing so, it expresses conflicting emotions about the idea that Oedipus might be the cause of the sickness in Thebes (27-28) and ironically imagines that the mystery of Oedipus's parentage might bring glory to the city (61). When the king's horrible secret is revealed, the chorus's sympathy for Oedipus's personal calamity is tempered by its concern for the shame that Oedipus causes Thebes (73).

The chorus of Antigone also consists of a group of Theban elders. Unlike the chorus in Oedipus Tyrannus, however, its relationship with Thebes's king is not based on mutual interest in the welfare of the city. The chorus in Antigone fears Creon's tyrannical behaviour, its fear inhibiting its ability to counsel the king. The chorus's reluctance to speak its mind to Creon causes its apparent ambivalence toward Antigone. Creon summons the chorus to hear his proclamation that Polyneices is to remain unburied, presumably because he wants it to approve of his decision. The chorus voices no opposition to Creon's proclamation, but is anxious to avoid responsibility for enforcing the edict (200). When a soldier arrives and announces that the corpse has mysteriously been buried, the chorus jumps to the conclusion that the gods have objected to Creon's attempt to dishonour the dead and admits that it has "had misgivings from the first" about the wisdom of Creon's policy (202). When Antigone is arrested and brought before Creon, she argues that she has merely obeyed divine law by honouring the dead. Although the chorus's earlier piety leads us to expect that it will support Antigone, it offers no words in her defense. Antigone explains the chorus's reluctance to defend her by suggesting that the chorus is inhibited by its fear of Creon's tyranny (212).

With Creon absent from the stage, the chorus watches Antigone being led to her death. Here, it openly approves of her actions, glorifying her as a martyr, attempting to comfort her, even addressing her as "my child" (233). But while the chorus exalts Antigone's decision to obey divine law rather than state law, it claims that she is responsible for her death, since she knew what reward her disobedience would merit in a state infected by tyranny: "where might is right / It's reckless to do wrong. / Self-propelled to death / You go with open eyes" (230). The chorus's sentiments imply that its reluctance to express dissent in front of Creon is based on its instinct for self-preservation. Only after Creon has been humbled by disaster does the chorus openly declare that the king was wrong (247).

Seneca similarly characterises choruses as self-interested cultural groups. In Medea, the chorus consists of Corinthian citizens; its perception of Medea is influenced by its fears about her power as a disruptive force in the state. It does not sympathise with her plight as a cast-off wife and mother, despite her articulation of the suffering that her husband's broken faith has caused her. It also attempts to ignore the breach of justice which has resulted in Medea's victimisation, wishing that she would leave Corinth so that it would not have to deal with her. The chorus repeatedly refers to Medea as a foreigner, wishing that "the mad woman of Colchis" would "go back to her own people, the land of her birth. Our ways were never her ways . . . . It's better for us, and better for her as well" (I. i. 94; 111-14). The chorus's desire to be rid of the cast-off wife, however, suggests that it feels guilty about the injustice that has been done to her (Fyfe 79).

In imitation of classical models, the authors of early modern closet dramas typically characterise their choruses as groups of individuals whose perceptions of the principal characters are influenced by their own contingent fortunes. In Samuel Daniel's Tragedie of Cleopatra (1594) the chorus represents the Egyptian population, which has suffered a radical change in fortunes as a result of the downfall of its queen. Viewing Cleopatra's actions with fear and disapproval, the chorus criticises her harshly for her past wantonness. It asserts that her extravagance has caused society's suffering, declaring that she "makes vs pay / For her disordered lust, / . . . thus she hath her state, herselfe, and vs vndone" (I. ii. 340-48). The chorus is willing that Cleopatra be punished for her self-indulgence, but it questions the gods' justice in punishing society for the faults of its queen. In the second ode, it addresses "Nemesis, / Daughter of iustice", asking "is it iustice that all we / The innocent poore multitude, / For great mens faults should punisht be . . .?" (II. ii. 750-53). It toys with the idea that "the powers of heauen doe play / With trauailed mortality" (738-39) and suggests that the gods' "crueltie" may be the cause of its suffering (759), but

quickly reassures itself that "the gods are euer iust, / Our faults excuse their rigor must" (760-1). The chorus finally admits, however, that it has also been guilty of extravagance: "We imitate the greater powers, / The Princes manners fashion ours . . . the wanton luxurie of Court / Did fashion people of like sort" (IV. iii. 1488-89; 1502-03). Yet by arguing that Cleopatra's wantonness has corrupted it, the chorus conveniently absolves itself from any blame for its own extravagance. It comforts itself with the vengeful hope that the "poyson" of self-indulgence which has brought about Egypt's ruin will "infect" the conquering Romans and will prove to be their downfall (IV. iii. 1518-32).

Daniel employs two choruses in Philotas (1595) to provide alternative viewpoints on the best form of government. The first three odes are delivered by a Grecian Chorus which is cynical about political corruption and which sympathises with Philotas, presenting him as a victim of the ambitions of other members of the court. After witnessing Philotas s trial by Alexander, an obvious travesty of justice, a Persian Chorus criticises the Greek political system because it thinks that public trials create turmoil in the state. The Grecian Chorus defends itself by saying that the legal process "satisfies the world, and we / Thinke that well done which done by law we see" (V. 1797-98). In the end, it is evident that there is little difference between the two systems of government: both are corrupt.

In his two closet dramas, Fulke Greville departs from the traditional characterisation of the chorus as representative of a specific cultural group. In Mustapha (1596) several choruses articulate a variety of viewpoints on the relationship between church and state. Choruses of "bashas" (counsellors), as well as Mahometan priests, "Conuerts to Mahometisme", and Tartars elaborate on the various ways in which the state abuses the church and the church exploits the populace. Greville also devotes one choral passage to a debate between Time and Eternity. In Alaham (1601) the various choral odes are delivered by Good Spirits and Evil Spirits,

who strive for mastery over the characters in the play. The final choral ode is delivered by a group "of people" who offer advice about how kings should govern, inadvertently suggesting that humans delude themselves when they believe that they are in control of their fates.[3]

The authors of closet dramas differ from many other early modern dramatists in their adherence to the classical use of the chorus. Other dramatists writing in the same time period either modify the chorus's function or do not include choruses in their plays. They break with the convention of using the chorus to represent a specific cultural group which is affected by the fortunes of a play's principal characters. Early modern dramatists frequently use single characters to deliver choric speeches. Such characters participate in the plot but are occasionally endowed with a perspective which is broader than that of an ordinary character. Choric commentary is often confined to prologues and epilogues. In Arden of Faversham (1592), for example, the epilogue is delivered by Franklin, who has participated in the play as the protagonist's "dearest friend" (III. iii. 34). He is clearly not omniscient during the action of the play; his assertion in the first act that women only want what they are forbidden to have is disproven by the dramatic development. In the epilogue, however, his viewpoint is evidently broadened beyond that of an ordinary character when he tells the audience how several characters will die after the time period framed by the play. Dramatists also occasionally give choral speeches to characters who do not appear in the play. In the prologue of Marlowe's Jew of Malta (c. 1589), "Machiavel" introduces the story of the miserly and politically manipulative Barabas. Machiavel's introduction serves to place the story in a larger political context, but in a way which is distinct from classical dramatists' use of the chorus to express the views of common people.

In her portrayal of the chorus in The Tragedy of Mariam, Cary follows the example set by classical dramatists and their imitators. The *dramatis personae* of

Cary's play defines the Chorus as "a company of Jews"[4], a characterisation which makes clear that the Chorus voices the opinions of a certain cultural group which shares common values and concerns. The Chorus's judgement of the protagonist is influenced by its desire to support the status quo, which is threatened by Mariam's defiance of patriarchal restrictions on women's freedom. It censures Mariam for a variety of moral faults, including outspokenness, sexual inconstancy, failure to perform her sexual duty toward her husband, and excessive pride. The Chorus does not provide objective commentary on the events of the play, since its perspective on Mariam's history is informed by its participation in patriarchal culture. We should not identify the Chorus's viewpoint with Cary's personal opinions.

Chapter Two

Inconsistent Judgement and the Chorus in Mariam

Commentators have generally ignored the fact that the Chorus in Mariam is characterised as "a company of Jews". Some critics have assumed that the Chorus's censorious words may be identified with the author's opinions. Betty Travitsky, for example, cites the Chorus's statement that wives must surrender both their bodies and their minds absolutely to their husbands as proof of "Cary's thesis that physical chastity alone is inadequate in the wife" ("*Feme Covert*" 189); Nancy Cotton Pearse notes the Chorus's injunction that a wife must abstain from "public language" and remarks that "these are hard beliefs for a woman who wished to be a writer" (605). Angeline Goreau ignores the dramatic context of the choral odes and presents the third ode as a "poem" written by Cary which illustrates her conservative beliefs about feminine modesty ("English Women" 106). Other critics assume that the Chorus provides an objective "philosophical commentary" on the action of the play (Beilin 167). Laurie J. Shannon suggests that the Chorus offers the "conventional, choral wisdom of socially-embedded response" (147), and Nancy Gutierrez argues that the Chorus voices "conventional disapproval" of Mariam's transgressions of the limits of virtuous wifely behaviour (246).

Critics who have proposed that the Chorus embodies "conventional wisdom" have not extensively explored the relationship between the Chorus's value system and the values endorsed by patriarchy, a relationship that is crucial to our understanding of the play. In their introduction to the recent edition of the play, Peter Weller and Margaret Ferguson remark that the Chorus consists of a company of Jews, but they do not follow up the implications of this description. They recognize that the "uneasy match" between the action of the play and the Chorus's commentary "suggests some characterization, if not of the Chorus, at least of its perspective" (35), yet they argue

that the Chorus is "dispassionate" (37) and that it views the play's events with "detached sympathy" (37). Barbara Kiefer Lewalski alone recognises that Cary's identification of the Chorus advises the reader that the Chorus will not provide objective commentary but rather that it speaks "from a partial, not an authoritative, vantage point" (198). The fact that the Chorus's judgements of Mariam "are undermined by the drama as a whole" results from Cary's characterisation of the Chorus as a cultural group whose perspective on Mariam's history is informed by its contradictory ideology about women (Lewalski 198).[5]

A close examination of the contradictions and inconsistencies associated with the Chorus will illustrate that it is not an objective, impartial group of observers, but that it views the play's events through the lens of patriarchal ideology. In the early modern period, a wife was expected to subjugate her will to that of her husband; the ideal wife was defined as chaste, silent, and obedient. The Chorus's evaluations of Mariam's moral standing illustrate its characteristically inconsistent judgement. At times the Chorus seems to think that Mariam is virtuous; at others it accuses her of moral shortcomings. Its judgement of Mariam is influenced by its preconceptions about women. The Chorus's prescriptions for wifely virtue are frequently contradictory: for example, in the third ode the Chorus states that a wife who indulges in public speech may be "most chaste" (III. iii. 231), yet it equates speech with sexual license (III. iii. 242-45). Although, as noted above, many critics have interpreted the Chorus's inconsistencies as evidence that Cary was ambivalent about women's worth and place in society, I would argue that the inconsistencies in the Chorus's statements should lead the reader to question the validity of the Chorus's judgement. The contradictions and inconsistencies associated with the Chorus revolve around three subjects: the Chorus's appraisals of Mariam's moral standing; the Chorus's criticism

of the protagonist, which contradicts the dramatic development of the play; and the Chorus's prescriptions for wifely virtue.

The Chorus's appraisals of Mariam's moral standing illustrate that its judgement of Mariam is influenced by its preconceptions about women. The motives that the Chorus attributes to Mariam occasionally contradict Mariam's own statements about the reasons behind her decisions. Although we should be cautious about assuming that Mariam's account of her motives has the weight of authorial sympathy (she is a complex character whose behaviour is, as I will show, occasionally also contradictory), the discrepancy between Mariam's statements and the Chorus's judgement is significant because it leads the reader to scrutinise each character's perspective.

After the first act, for example, the Chorus delivers a speech on the folly of discontentedness. While the Chorus does not identify Mariam as the target of its moralising in the early stanzas of the ode, in the fifth stanza it explicitly criticises her for wanting to replace her husband with another man:

> Still Mariam wish'd 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?
>
> (I. vi. 517-22)

Weller and Ferguson note that the Chorus's admonition against unchecked desire is appropriate to Salome, who is shown in Act One scheming to replace her current husband with her lover; the reader finds it "almost shocking to discover, in the fifth stanza, that all along the Chorus has been talking about Mariam" (35-6). The Chorus's assertion that Mariam wishes Herod dead because of her desire for sexual "variety"

contradicts Mariam's own account of the reasons behind her ambivalent feelings toward her husband. In her opening monologue, Mariam states that she feels rage toward Herod because he engineered the deaths of her brother and grandfather, and because he left orders that she be executed in the event of his death (I. i. 35-50; 59-62). Furthermore, Mariam explicitly states that she does not wish to replace Herod with another man:

> 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 learn'd, the other I abhorr'd.
>
> (I. i. 27-30)

As Krontiris observes, Mariam "does not love another man; not only that, but she categorically rejects adultery as an option"(84). Mariam's actions do not belie her words; she does not engage in any sexual relationship while Herod is absent. Furthermore, her assertion that she is chaste is supported by the testimony of Sohemus, who recognizes that outspokenness does not necessarily reflect sexual license. He calls Mariam a "chaste queen", but laments that "Unbridled speech is Mariam's worst disgrace, / And will endanger her without desert" (III. iii. 205; 183-4). In contrast with Mariam, Salome explicitly states that she wishes to disburden herself of her current husband Constabarus in order to wed her paramour Silleus. She delivers a passionate speech that exemplifies the sort of unbridled desire that the Chorus condemns (I. iv.). Weller and Ferguson (35-6) as well as Straznicky explain the Chorus's accusation that Mariam desires sexual "variety" by suggesting that the Chorus displaces Salome's craving for another man onto Mariam: "the ethical implications of Salome's desire", suggests Straznicky, "are written rather strangely onto the condition of Mariam" (127).

I would propose another explanation for the Chorus's conclusion that Mariam's wish for Herod's death is based on her desire for sexual "variety": the Chorus conflates outspokenness with sexual license, and assumes that Mariam's reputation for outspokenness implicates her in illicit sexual desire. The Chorus does not confuse Mariam with Salome; rather, it imposes its preconceptions about the nature of woman onto Mariam. Its fusion of outspokenness and sexual impropriety causes it to believe that Mariam craves sexual "variety" despite her explicit disavowal of any desire to replace Herod with another man. Herod's suspicion that Mariam is having a sexual affair is likewise based on the premise that verbal license is a sign of infidelity, an association that is succinctly encapsulated in Herod's statement that Mariam is "unchaste, / Her mouth will ope to ev'ry stranger's ear" (IV. vii. 433-4). The Chorus's later comment that a wife is less than perfectly virtuous if she "more than to her lord alone will give / A private word to any second ear" (III. iii. 228-9) echoes Herod's fears about Mariam's willingness to open her mouth to a "stranger's ear" and confirms that the Chorus equates verbal and sexual license.[6]

The image of Mariam opening her mouth to a stranger's ear is charged by early modern connotations of ears and tongues as erotic organs. The tongue was conceptualised as substitute phallus; the ear served as a receptive passageway penetrable by speech. The erotic potential of tongues and ears is suggested in Shakespeare's Othello. Othello informs the Venetian senators that Desdemona fell in love with him because he recounted his military exploits to her. Desdemona's ear thus served as a means to arouse erotic interest. Othello describes Desdemona's eagerness to be wooed by characterising her as possessed of a "greedy ear" (I. iii. 151). Herod's concern that Mariam opens her mouth to strange ears suggests that he sees her willingness to do so as a sign of sexual promiscuity. In Herod's vision, Mariam does not merely provide a receptive ear, but becomes the sexual aggressor through her

exercise of language. Her exercise of speech is thus unnatural, since it represents a sexual role inversion.

The discrepancies between the Chorus's interpretation of Mariam's actions and the protagonist's about her motives lead the reader to scrutinise both perspectives. In the third ode, the Chorus assumes that Mariam's exercise of "public language" is motivated by vainglory. The Chorus does not dispute Mariam's virtue, but it does reproach her for wanting her virtue to be publicly acclaimed:

> And every mind, though free from thought of ill,
> That out of glory seeks a worth to show,
> 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.
>
> (III. iii. 245-50)

The Chorus's assertion that Mariam is motivated by vainglory contradicts Mariam's explanation of her behaviour. In the scene prior to the Chorus's ode, Mariam suggests that her "rebellion" is the result of her desire to maintain personal integr .y. She expresses satisfaction with her irreproachable moral conduct:

> To be commandress of the triple earth,
> And sit in safety from a fall secure:
> To have all nations celebrate my birth,
> ! would not that my spirit were impure.
> Let my distressèd state unpitied be,
> Mine innocence is hope enough for me.
>
> (III. iii. 175-180)

Mariam asserts that she strives to act in accordance with her conscience. She refuses to pander to Herod, informing him that "I cannot frame disguise, nor never taught / My face a look dissenting from my thought" (IV. iii. 145-6). While she is satisfied with the moral propriety of her conduct, she does not express any desire to be

publicly renowned for her virtue.[7] Faced with conflicting perspectives on the motives behind Mariam's actions, we must draw our own conclusions about the protagonist's moral standing and about the reasoning behind the Chorus's judgements.

The Chorus undermines the validity of its judgement when it adopts contradictory views on Mariam's moral standing in a single ode. Ferguson notes that in the third ode, for example, the Chorus has difficulty defining the exact nature of the protagonist's moral fault. "According to the second stanza", Ferguson observes, "the error involves indulging in, rather than refraining from, something that is characterized as 'lawfull' liberty"; however, "When the Chorus goes on to specify the error as a fault of *speech*, . . . its 'lawful' status seems to disappear. By stanza five, the error is the distinctly illegitimate political one of 'usurping upon another's right'" ("Spectre" 241). Ferguson further suggests that the Chorus's contradictory judgements of Mariam reveal its moral precepts to be "confused" and "incoherent" (243). As noted above, in the first ode the Chorus implies that Mariam is unchaste, at least in thought, by stating that she desires sexual "variety". In the third ode, the Chorus vacillates, as the result of its conflation of speech and sexuality, between declaring Mariam chaste and unchaste. Ferguson notes that in the third stanza the Chorus implies that Mariam is "most chaste" despite her outspokenness; by the fifth stanza, however, it suggests that Mariam has transgressed the boundaries of wifely virtue because "chastity has evidently been redefined as a figurative property pertaining to the mind, which is 'not chast' if it's 'not peculiar'" ("Spectre" 242). I would argue that the final stanza of the ode also suggests that Mariam is physically chaste despite her outspokenness:

> And every mind, though free from thought of ill,
> That out of glory seeks a worth to show,
> 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.
>
> (III. iii. 245-50)

The Chorus criticises Mariam for seeking public acclaim, but it does acknowledge that she is essentially virtuous. It argues that Mariam would have been morally irreproachable if she had scrupulously avoided any appearance of transgression *in addition to* being "innocent", implying that Mariam is in fact physically chaste. Because the Chorus here revises its earlier assessment of Mariam as sexually suspect (since it equates common bodies with common minds, and accuses Mariam of outspokenness), the reader is led to question the reliability of its judgement.[8]

The reliability of the Chorus's evaluations of Mariam's moral standing is also undermined by its belated pronouncement of Mariam as "guiltless" (V. i. 272). The Chorus's sudden sympathy for Mariam is surprising, since it has chastised her for a variety of moral defects over the course of the play. It does not explain the reasoning behind its change of heart, but briefly refers to Mariam as "guiltless" in its matter-of-fact summary of the play's events. The Chorus's erratic judgement of Mariam's moral standing resembles Herod's vacillation over his wife's moral culpability.[9] The Chorus, like Herod, acclaims Mariam as virtuous or condemns her as impure based on the imposition of its own fears and preconceptions onto her actions, with no external justification for its judgements.

Cary's employment of an inconsistent Chorus may be understood as a criticism of the sexual double standard which permits inconstancy only in men. Mariam is deeply concerned, for example, with the injustice of the patriarchal law which allows husbands to divorce while denying the same prerogative to wives. Shannon observes that the law of divorce endorsed by patriarchy "authorizes the inconstancy in husbands that plagues [Herod's] kingdom" (150). Herod had divorced his former wife, Doris, so that he could wed Mariam. Cary brings the plight of abandoned women to the reader's attention by having Doris express her bitterness at Herod's unjustified

desertion of her. Doris recalls the days when she was Herod's wife: "Then was I young, and rich, and nobly born, And therefore worthy to be Herod's mate: Yet thou ungrateful cast me off with scorn, When Heaven's purpose rais'd your meaner fate" (II. iii. 243-46). Maurice Valency notes that Cary is unique in her attention to Doris's situation. No other author who produced a play based on the Herod and Mariam legend "seems to have been particularly interested in" Herod's abandoned former wife (255). Herod's sister Salome, scheming to replace her present husband with her paramour, delivers a persuasive argument in support of a woman's right to divorce her husband.[10] While Salome is presented as a "villainous" character, her motive for wanting to divorce her husband is identical to Herod's motive for divorcing Doris. The Chorus's erratic judgements may thus be seen as a symptom of the inconstancy which is socially permitted in men but condemned in women.[11]

The questionable validity of the Chorus's harsh judgements is foregrounded in the play's presentation of Mariam at the time of her execution. Elaine Beilin first recognised that Mariam's death is "an allegory of the Crucifixion" (171), the imagery and events surrounding Mariam's execution portraying her as "a type of Christ" (164). Cary alters her source for the play, Josephus's Jewish Antiquities, by adding details that serve to exalt Mariam as a precursor of Christ. While Josephus records that Mariam "went to her death with an unshaken firmness of mind, and without changing the color of her face, and thereby evidently discovered the nobility of her descent to the spectators, even in the last moments of her life" (412), Cary's Mariam displays a divine composure that leads the nuntio to describe the execution as her "triumph"(V. i. 56). Cary adds Mariam's final declaration that "By three days hence, if wishes could revive, / I know himself [Herod] would make me oft alive" (V. i. 77-8), a statement which alludes to the three days between Christ's crucifixion and his resurrection. Cary also invents the detail of the treacherous butler who hangs himself as a parallel to Judas Iscariot's suicide. Ferguson notes that while Josephus does not specify

Mariam's mode of death, Cary has her beheaded, which serves to associate Mariam with John the Baptist ("Running" 55). The contrast between the Chorus's harsh criticism of Mariam and the imagery and events surrounding her death suggests that we should not necessarily accept the Chorus's condemnation of the protagonist.[12] While the Chorus criticizes Mariam for her lapses from virtue, the imagery surrounding her death glorifies her as a martyr. The conflict between these two perspectives should lead the reader to question the value of the Chorus's judgement, as well as to consider whether Mariam's behaviour has warranted martyrdom.[13]

Part of the reason why the Chorus's judgement of the protagonist is inconsistent is that its ideas about what comprises virtuous behaviour in women contain internal contradictions.[14] The Chorus's remarks in the third ode about the relationship between women's virtue and "glory" provide an example of the inconsistent standards by which the Chorus judges Mariam's moral worth. The term "glory" undergoes a transformation over the course of the ode. Initially the Chorus uses the word "glory" in a way that suggests it is roughly equivalent to "virtue". In the first stanza the Chorus decrees that the virtuous wife should censor her own behaviour: "'Tis not so glorious for her to be free, / As by her proper self restrain'd to be" (III. iii. 219-20); in the second stanza, the wife is reminded that "It is no glory to forbear alone / Those things that may her honour overthrow" (III. iii. 223-4). In both instances, the context in which the Chorus uses the term "glory" seems to allow for the possibility that a virtuous wife may receive public recognition for her adherence to the Chorus's moral precepts. In stanza three the Chorus evidently equates a wife's "glory" with her public reputation, proclaiming that a wife who engages in public speech "doth her glory blot, / And wounds her honour, though she kills it not" (III. iii. 231-2). "Glory" remains a positive, or at least neutral term, allowing for the possibility of public acknowledgement of wifely virtue. In the final

stanza, however, the Chorus accuses Mariam of transgressing the boundaries of wifely virtue by engaging in "public language" through a desire for "glory":

> And every mind, though free from thought of ill,
> That out of glory seeks a worth to show,
> 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.
>
> (III. iii. 245-50)

In this case, the context suggests that the Chorus uses the term "glory" in the sense of "The disposition to claim honour for oneself; boastful spirit" (OED). Ferguson and Weller propose that the Chorus here also suggests that Mariam is vainglorious, a term which the OED defines as "inordinately boastful or proud of one's own abilities, actions, or qualities; excessively or ostentatiously vain". The Chorus accuses Mariam of having an inflated opinion of her own moral worth. Interestingly, the virtuous qualities which the Chorus equates with "glory" in the first stanza are now designated by the word "pureness". "Glory" has suddenly become a negatively charged word in relation to female virtue, a sign of moral defect which causes a wife to fall from virtue instead of a sign of her virtuous behaviour. The Chorus's replacement of the term "glory" with "pureness" to denote wifely virtue suggests that the Chorus is unwilling to admit that wives may attain public approval for their virtue. The slippage in the use of the term "glory" exposes an inconsistency in the Chorus's doctrine: the Chorus alternately states that a wife should be conscious of her "glory" so that she will be extremely wary of doing anything to blemish it, therefore denying the possibility that her virtue may be worthy of "glory".

The relationship between a wife's sense of self-worth and the requirement that she humble herself in order to be virtuous causes some inconsistency in the Chorus's statements in the fourth ode. In the first stanza, the Chorus declares that "The fairest

action of our human life / Is scorning to revenge an injury" (IV. viii. 629-30). The Chorus here praises abused individuals who do not deign to exact revenge for the wrongs done to them, but instead exhibit a "virtuous scorn":

> A noble heart doth teach a virtuous scorn:
> To scorn to owe a duty overlong,
> To scorn to be for benefits forborne,
> To scorn to lie, to scorn to do a wrong,
> To scorn to bear an injury in mind,
> To scorn a freeborn heart slavelike to bind.
>
> (IV. viii. 647-52)

"Virtuous scorn" evidently consists of a sense of self-worth or dignity which enables a mistreated individual not only to execute her or his duty but also to develop an immunity to mistreatment. The concept is essentially paradoxical, however, since in order for individuals to scorn to feel wronged, they must be conscious of the fact that they have been wronged. The Chorus's insistence that abused individuals should not only conscientiously perform their "duty" but should also cultivate an inner insensitivity to ill treatment, is reminiscent of its earlier argument that a virtuous wife should not rely on the appearance of virtue but should "bare herself of power as well as will" to engage in immoral acts (III. iii. 215-18). The Chorus demands that a wife surrender herself absolutely to her husband in thought, word, and deed. But its exaltation of the individual who "virtuously scorns" to exact revenge for the wrongs that have been done to her seems incompatible with its unexpected suggestion in the fifth stanza that revenge is, in some cases, not wholly ignoble:

> But if for wrongs we needs revenge must have,
> Then be our vengeance of the noblest kind:
> Do we his body from our fury save,
> And let our hate prevail against our mind?
> What can 'gainst him a greater vengeance be,
> Than make his foe more worthy far than he?
>
> (IV. viii. 653-58)

The Chorus claims that the "virtuous scorn" which motivates an injured individual to scorn to revenge an injury ironically provides the "noblest" form of revenge. A victim who "virtuously scorns" revenge paradoxically obtains revenge because her exercise of "virtuous scorn" makes her morally superior to the individual who wrongs her. According to the Chorus, a mistreated individual may triumph over her abuser by refusing to express or admit the fact that she has been mistreated: essentially, by ignoring the injury. Kennedy observes that the Chorus's emphasis on "the connection between restraint and a virtuous superiority is notable. In place of humble self-denial and submission, the Chorus offers a submission that asserts the superiority of the self-denying subject" (128). It is, perhaps, not surprising that the Chorus advocates the exercise of "virtuous scorn" in response to mistreatment: if an abused individual neither expresses nor allows herself to feel a sense of injury, her abuser will receive no reproach. A mistreated wife who exercises "virtuous scorn" will not resent being mistreated by her husband and hence will pose no threat to the hierarchy of the sexes. Her revenge will be meaningless in practical terms. The Chorus's prescription is logically impossible, however, since in order for a wife to "virtuously scorn" feeling wronged she must be conscious that she has been wronged. The Chorus's condemnation of Mariam for not exhibiting "virtuous scorn" is complicated by its sudden accusation in the final stanza that she has been "virtuously proud". Exactly what the Chorus is criticising in Mariam is unclear. Weller and Ferguson emend the text so that "virtuous pride" may be identified with "virtuous scorn", thus obscuring the ambiguity of the text. In the quarto, the final stanza of the fourth ode reads as follows:

> Had *Mariam* scorned to leaue a due vnpaide,
> Shee would to *Herod* then haue paid her loue:
> And not haue bene by sullen passion swaide
> To fixe her thoughts all iniurie aboue
> Is vertuous pride. Had *Mariam* thus bene prou'd,

Long famous life to her had bene allowd.

(IV. viii. 1934-09)

Weller and Ferguson note that A. C. Dunstan and W. W. Greg, the editors of the 1914 Malone society reprint, propose emending "Is" in line 1938 to "In", thereby clarifying the Chorus's statement (173). Weller and Ferguson choose instead to repunctuate the stanza in order to make the Chorus's statement about "virtuous pride" consistent with its earlier statements about "virtuous scorn":

> Had Mariam scorn'd to leave a due unpaid,
> She would to Herod then have paid her love:
> And not have been by sullen passion sway'd.
> To fix her thoughts all injury above
> Is virtuous pride. Had Mariam thus been prov'd,
> Long famous life to her had been allow'd.
>
> (IV. viii. 659-64)

Weller and Ferguson justify the emendation by suggesting that the line, "To fix her thoughts all injury above / Is virtuous pride," is "virtually a summary of the third stanza"(173). They do not comment on the Chorus's sudden and surprising use of the phrase "virtuous pride" to designate the quality that it consistently designates as "virtuous scorn" throughout the rest of the ode. Nor do they comment on the Chorus's awkward use of tense. If the Chorus were criticising Mariam for not exhibiting a single quality that it designates as either "virtuous pride" or "virtuous scorn", presumably it would state, "To fix her thoughts all injury above *would be* virtuous pride". Instead it claims that "To fix her thoughts all injury above *is* virtuous pride", paradoxically suggesting that Mariam is currently exercising the quality which it is criticising her for not exercising. In their attempt to make the Chorus's statements consistent, Weller and Ferguson further ignore the ambiguous wording of the phrase, "fix her thoughts all injury above". Presenting the line as a repetition of the Chorus's earlier prescriptions for an abused individual to be insensitive to mistreatment, Weller and Ferguson observe that "In the context of the Chorus as a whole, it scarcely

seems that fixing one's thoughts above all resentment of injuries would be the result of 'sullen passion'"(173). The Chorus's words could, however, be interpreted as a reproach of Mariam for exhibiting a sense of virtuous superiority. The phrase "thoughts all injury" could refer to the Chorus's perception of Mariam's consciousness of the fact that she has been mistreated; she "fix[es] her thoughts . . . above" in that she feels morally superior because she is proud of her virtue. If we retain the quarto's punctuation of the stanza, adopting Dunstan and Greg's suggestion to emend "Is" to "In", then the first two lines of the stanza comment on a quality that Mariam should have displayed: "Had Mariam scorned to leave a due unpaid, / She would to Herod then have paid her love". The phrase, "And not have been by sullen passion sway'd / To fix her thoughts all injury above / In virtuous pride", comments on how Mariam actually did respond to Herod's mistreatment of her. The closing sentence echoes the first sentence's construction, and again refers to how Mariam should have reacted to Herod: "Had Mariam thus been proud, / Long famous life to her had been allow'd".

It is understandable that Weller and Ferguson conflate "virtuous scorn" and "virtuous pride", since the distinction between the two concepts is not readily apparent. Both terms identify the mistreated individual as virtuous. Both terms, as well, imply that the abused individual is proud: to scorn to do something is to feel that the action is "beneath one", implying that the scorning individual must have a sense of self-worth or pride. The Chorus's final statement further complicates the two concepts. The quarto version reads, "Had Mariam thus been prou'd, / Long famous life to her had been allowd"; Weller and Ferguson transcribe the word "prou'd" as "prov'd", based on the similarity of the letters *u* and *v* in seventeenth-century usage, without noting any possible alternative readings. I would argue that "prov'd" should be emended to "proud" because "proud" rhymes exactly with "allow'd", the final word of the following line.[15] If one identifies "virtuous scorn" with "virtuous pride", doing

so does not significantly change the sense of the stanza; however, if one sees the two terms as denoting distinct concepts, the Chorus's reproof that Mariam should have "thus been proud" implies that "virtuous scorn" explicitly requires the abused individual to feel pride. The distinction between "virtuous scorn" and "virtuous pride" thus collapses. The only difference between the two concepts seems to be in the behaviour they inspire: while "virtuous pride" makes one conscious of one's injury and causes one to react to abuse by refusing to fulfil one's obligations, "virtuous scorn" makes one feel that it is "beneath one" to express injury.

The Chorus's argument that wives should possess a sense of pride that will enable them to be insensitive to mistreatment conflicts with the Chorus's criticism in the third ode that Mariam is vainglorious. Kennedy describes the contradiction in the Chorus's directives as a "tension between wifely subjection and self-valuing" (129); a virtuous wife is supposed to have a sense of self-worth so that she will scorn to feel or express resentment, while at the same time maintaining a low estimate of her worth in order to avoid being vainglorious. A wife is simultaneously to feel superior to her abuser and to humble herself in relation to him. Kennedy observes that "scorn" is an "irreverent" emotion for a wife to have because it

> require[s] a self-affirming subjectivity which can feel superior, undervalued or wronged. Scorn . . . means that a wife has judged herself and her husband, compared herself to him, and found him lacking, a conclusion that contradicts the hierarchy of sex difference. (118)

A wife's belief that she is morally superior to her husband is thus incompatible with the self-effacing submission that she is supposed to cultivate.

The relevance of the Chorus's arguments about "virtuous scorn" to Mariam's situation, however, is unclear. At certain points in the play, the scorn that Mariam exhibits corresponds to the type that the Chorus designates as "virtuous scorn". On other occasions, Mariam disdains individuals out of a sense of superiority based on

her royal birth. Her indulgence in a form of scorn based on birth instead of virtue implies that she is less than morally perfect. Sometimes the scorn that Mariam exhibits corresponds to the type that the Chorus designates as "virtuous scorn". At the time of Mariam's execution, for example, Alexandra reviles her daughter. The nuntio reports Mariam's reaction to the upbraiding:

> Nuntio. She made no answer, but she look'd the while,
> As if thereof she scarce did notice take,
> Yet smil'd, a dutiful, though scornful, smile.
> Herod. Sweet creature, I that look to mind do call;
> Full oft hath Herod been amaz'd withal.
>
> (V. i. 50-54)

Because Mariam's expression is both "dutiful" and "scornful", we can assume that she is exercising the "virtuous scorn" that the Chorus exalts in the fourth ode. Herod's recognition of Mariam's reaction suggests that she had also "virtuously scorned" her husband in the past. The Chorus's criticism in the fourth ode that Mariam indulges in "the wrong kind of pride and scorn" presumably refers to Mariam's recent refusal to pay Herod his sexual "due" (Kennedy 129). By acting on her awareness that she has been wronged, Mariam indulges in "virtuous pride" as opposed to "virtuous scorn". Yet we know that even when Mariam had earlier demonstrated a "dutiful, though scornful" attitude toward her husband, she resented Herod's mistreatment of her. The Chorus does not explain how a wife is to have a sense of pride in her virtue and yet refrain from being proud of herself.

At other points in the play, Mariam feels a sense of superiority based not on moral uprightness, but on her "high" birth. Her pride in her pedigree figures prominently in her relationship with her sister-in-law. Mariam repeatedly insults Salome by denigrating her class background and ethnic origin. The third scene of the first act provides an example of a typically hostile exchange between the two women:

Salome. If noble Herod still remain'd in life:
Your daughter's betters far, I dare maintain,
Might have rejoic'd to be my brother's wife.
Mariam. My betters far! Base woman, 'tis untrue,
You scarce have ever my superiors seen:
For Mariam's servants were as good as you,
Before she came to be Judea's queen.
Salome. Now stirs the tongue that is so quickly mov'd,
But more than once your choler have I borne:
Your fumish words are sooner said than prov'd,
And Salome's reply is only scorn.
Mariam. Scorn those that are for thy companions held.
Though I thy brother's face had never seen,
My birth thy baser birth so far excell'd,
I had to both of you the princess been.
Thou parti-Jew, and parti-Edomite,
Thou mongrel: issu'd from rejected race . . . .

(I. iii. 220-36)

Mariam's scorn of Salome is based not on Mariam's virtue, but on her privileged position in the class hierarchy. Instead of scorning to be hurt by Salome's insult, Mariam derides her sister-in-law. In this context, Mariam's scorn is fuelled by pride, which is generally understood to be a moral flaw. Her attack on Salome thus qualifies our view of her moral standing. It is debatable, moreover, whether Mariam ever grows beyond her prejudice. Although she does, prior to her execution, state that she does not envy the earthly power and status of any prince, she nevertheless envisions herself sitting in Sara's lap, which can be interpreted as her assumption that she will have a privileged status in heaven (IV. viii. 571-74).

Mariam's relationship with Salome also suggests that the patriarchal doctrine expounded by the Chorus influences the behaviour of the women in the play. The rancorous exchange quoted above is typical of the interactions between female characters. In a hierarchal social order, individuals are premitted to criticise only their equals or inferiors. The women in the play are automatically subordinated to men because of their sex. Their derogation of each other can be at least partly

attributed to their attempt to assert superiority over other women in order to achieve status in a world in which women are collectively subjugated to men. Kennedy proposes that the "venomous exchange between Salome and Mariam . . . suggests some ways that a virtuous wife can express impermissible emotions such as pride, scorn, or animosity" (119). Since women's subjection makes it difficult for them to oppose the men who oppress them, they displace their anger and frustration onto other women, whom they can disparage with impunity. Fischer notes that the "powerful exchanges" between female characters "fail to offer a 'counter-universe' to the male-oriented and dominated order . . . . Instead, each woman postures against the representation of tyranny in her own way and alone" (233-34). Despite the fact that it is contradictory and inconsistent, the patriarchal doctrine expounded by the Chorus effectively causes oppressed women to direct their anger at each other instead of at the men who oppress them. The women in the play have, to some extent, internalised the system of hierarchy that is promoted by the Chorus.

II

Patriarchal Ideology and the Domestic-Conduct Guide

Cary employs a contradictory and inconsistent Chorus partly as a means to criticise obliquely the confusion in the value system of seventeenth-century patriarchal society. Changes in marriage in the early modern period resulted in ideological conflicts. The authors of domestic-conduct guides address a wide range of topics, from practical advice on household management to philosophical discussions of the nature of marriage. A favourite subject is the behaviour proper to wives. Conduct guides, however, contradict one another about what kind of behaviour is acceptable in wives because their authors differ considerably in their beliefs about what constitutes wifely virtue. The guides also exhibit internal inconsistencies similar to those found in the Chorus's statements. Valerie Wayne notes that "as enunciations of ideologies [domestic-conduct] texts are products of the contradictions of their own social conditions" (13). A brief discussion of some of the contradictions in domestic-conduct literature will illustrate that the Chorus's precepts for wifely virtue reflect inconsistencies in seventeenth-century patriarchal ideology.

Both the Chorus and the authors of domestic-conduct guides are concerned with the moral propriety of women's speech. Many guides emphasize that women should refrain from speaking whenever possible, and present silence as a feminine virtue. While some authors associate women's speech with sexual license in a way that is reminiscent of the Chorus's conflation of verbal and sexual transgression, others do not. Francesco Barbaro's pronouncement, in On Wifely Duties (1415), that "the speech of a noble woman can be no less dangerous than the nakedness of her limbs" and that "for this reason women ought to avoid conversations with strangers" (205), echoes the Chorus's conclusion that if a wife "seeks to be by public language grac'd: / . . . Though her thoughts reflect with purest light, / Her mind if not peculiar is not chaste" (III.

iii. 240-42). In A Bride-Bush: Or, a Wedding Sermon (1617) William Whately declares that wives who scold their husbands are "next to harlots, if not the same with them" (39). Jacques DuBosq, in contrast, suggests in The Compleat Woman (1639) that a wife's honour will be stained by speech only if she engages in "*Conuersation* of the looser sort" (24). Other authors, such as Richard Brathewaite (The English Gentlewoman, 1631) and Juan Luis Vives (Instruction of a Christian Woman, 1523), while urging women to be discreet and modest in their speech, never link verbal license and sexual transgression.

Both Mariam's Chorus and the conduct guides demand that a wife's obedience must be accompanied by internal subjection. In the third ode, the Chorus insists that wives must "wholly give themselves away" (III. iii. 234) by cultivating an inward devotion to their husbands as well as performing their duties scrupulously. In Of Domesticall Duties (1622) William Gouge condemns "meere outward, complementall subiection", which he defines as "when a wife doth euen despise her husband in her heart, . . . and yet carry a faire face before him", and devalues any duties performed without inward subordination (334). Similarly, Whately stresses that the "reuerence" that wives bear their husbands "must bee both inward and outward" (37). In Barbaro's writing, the tension between virtue and virtuous appearances results in textual inconsistency. In discussing the love that wives should bear their husbands, Barbaro states that "in all matters there is no better, no shorter path than being exactly what we seem to be" (196); thus, "if wives want to seem to love their husbands deeply, let them love them from their hearts" (197). He insists that wives should "feign nothing, dissemble nothing, and conceal nothing" (197). Later in his argument, however, Barbaro encourages deceit to cultivate the appearance of virtue. Commenting on the proper boundaries of wives' sexual appetites, he counsels that "if a woman should transgress these limits, I wish that she will curb herself so that she will be, or *at least seem to be*, chaste" (213; emphasis mine).

The concern which authors of domestic-conduct guides exhibit about the potential discrepancy between wives' thoughts and actions frequently stems from an anxiety about whether wives have internalised the notion of their inferiority to their husbands. While authors insist that wives must acknowledge their inferiority, in practice they allow exceptions to the rule. Whately states that "the whole duty of the wife is referred to two heads. The first is, to acknowledge her inferiority: the next, to carry her selfe as inferiour" (36), and he insists that "the wiues iudgement must be conuinced, that she is not her husbands equall, yea that her husband is her better by farre" (36). Yet the example Whately uses to illustrate wifely subjection suggests that some exceptional wives may in fact be their husbands' superiors:

> The reason of which duty is grounded euen vpon the consideration of the two sexes: for euen as youth is inferiour to age, and the yong folke to the aged (vnlesse some other respect doe ouer-ballance this difference, as sometimes it falles out that the younger is in authority, and the elder vnder it; the younger hath more excellent gifts; the elder fewer, and such like; by which the inferiority of young men is shadowed, and as it were couered:) so is the male sexe preferred before the female in degree of place & dignity. (40)

While Whately is convinced in theory of wives' inferiority, he implicitly admits that some "gifted" wives are their husbands' superiors. A similar inconsistency is evident in Gouge's writing. Discussing the nature of marriage, Gouge insists that "an husband hath superiority and authorite over a wife" (270). Yet in a later argument about a wife's responsibilities in a household he admits that some wives may be their husbands' intellectual superiors: "I denie not but that a wife may haue more vnderstanding then her husband: for some men are very ignorant and blockish; and on the other side, some women well instructed, who thereby haue attained to a great measure of knowledge, and discretion" (338). However, neither Gouge nor Whately provides any illuminating advice on how a wife may determine whether she is

legitimately "superior" to her husband or on how she may justifiably exercise the authority that society bestows upon him.

Wayne and Rose have pointed out that a wife's status as inferior to her husband leads to inconsistencies in the treatises of authors who conceive of marriage as a partnership. Rose observes that most of the "unresolved logical discrepancies" in domestic-conduct guides "center on the issue of equality between spouses and the corollary tenet of wifely obedience and subordination" (126). Conduct-guide authors do not attempt to reconcile the contradiction between a wife's status as her husband's partner – a position which implies equality with her husband – and her duty to subordinate herself to him. In The Christen State of Matrimonye (1541), Heinrich Bullinger, for example, views marriage as an "mutuall felaushiр + partakyng of all thinges" (Sig. 58) and emphasizes a couple's reciprocal obligation to love, help, and defend each other; yet he insists that "euery honest wife [must] submytte hirselfe to serue hir husband with all hir power . . . and in all thinges to ordre hirselfe after his commaundement" (Sig. 56). Thomas Becon, in The Boke of Matrimony (c.1562), similarly sees marriage as an "equal partaking of all such thinges as god shal send", yet expects wives to serve their husbands in subjection (quoted in Powell 127-28). Wayne places early modern arguments about companionate marriage in the context of the historical debate over the nature of the matrimonial bond to show that "companionate marriage still tries to legitimate the hierarchies of class and gender which sustained the Tudor religious and social order" (4). The contradictions in domestic-conduct texts are evidence of contemporary ideology straining to accommodate the idea of wives' equality in marriage in a hierarchal social order.

The authors of domestic-conduct literature are anxious to ensure that wives internalise the notion of their inferiority, perhaps because they fear that women who do not wholly subject themselves to their husbands will want to usurp their husbands' authority. Gouge declares that it is "monstrous" for a wife to be "aboue her husband"

(344) and warns that wives who have a sense of pride in their abilities will think that they are "fit to guide and rule both their husband and all the houshold" (275-76). He adds that there is "no more pestilent vice for an inferiour, then [pride]: it is the cause of all rebellion, disobedience, & disloyalty" (331). Vives warns that wives who do not accept the notion of their innate inferiority to their husbands will appropriate their husbands' "sovereignty"; and who, he asks, "will give any honor to that man whom he seeth mastered by a woman [?]" (115). Bullinger likewise advises that "pryde" will inspire a wife to "obstinate rebellion" (Sig. 45).

In order to suppress the threat of women who might conceive of themselves as their husbands' equals and consequently challenge marital hierarchy, the authors of conduct treatises counsel women to harbour a low opinion of their self-worth. Gouge recommends that wives "purge out of their hearts pride, and selfe-conceit, thinking humbly and lowly of themselues" (276); the anonymous author of The Whole Duty of a Woman (1696) advises women that modesty should cause them to avoid "any thing tending to confidence . . . balancing the mind with humble and sober thoughts of your selves" (52). But while authors counsel women to cultivate a low opinion of themselves, they also encourage them to have a sense of self-worth based on their virtue. In advising wives to bear ill treatment from their husbands patiently, Gouge suggests that a longsuffering wife should inwardly console herself with her confidence in her virtue:

> To her selfe, in that it will minister inward sweet comfort vnto her, though her husband should take no notice of her subiection, or mis-interpret it, or ill requite it; for she might say as *Hezakiah* did, *Remember o Lord how I haue walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect heart, and haue done that which is good in thy sight.* (333)

However, Gouge's encouragement of a sense of quiet self-righteousness in virtuous wives is at odds with his counsel that wives should "purge out of their hearts pride" and think of themselves "humbly and lowly". Vives similarly advises women to "love

[their] own virtues" (110). DuBosq discusses the fickleness of public opinion and the consequent difficulty of maintaining an unblemished reputation, concluding that "an honest *Woman* should esteeme vertue more then Reputation" (52).

In The Tragedy of Mariam the contradictory demands that a wife should think humbly of herself yet be proud of her virtue, also cause inconsistency in the Chorus's judgements of the protagonist. As noted above, in the third ode the Chorus criticises Mariam for being vainglorious, implying that she has an inflated opinion of her moral worth. Its accusation in the fourth ode that Mariam indulges in "virtuous pride" confirms the Chorus's opinion that Mariam's pride in her virtue itself is a lapse from virtue. Yet it recommends that wives should exhibit "virtuous scorn", a quality which, as noted above, requires wives to have some pride in their moral virtue. Neither the Chorus nor the authors of conduct guides advise women how to have exactly the right amount and the right kind of pride in their virtue.

Chapter Three

Politics, Didacticism, and the Dialectical Nature of Closet Drama

Dialectical thought is integral to closet drama, the literary genre to which Mariam belongs. As stated earlier, closet dramas provide a forum for the exploration of moral, political, and philosophical issues. Plot and character serve as instruments for the exposition of ideas. Gutierrez observes that "In opting to write a closet drama, Cary . . . signal[s] quite clearly both subject matter and rhetorical strategy to her audience" (238). The coterie audience of highly educated individuals for whom the plays were written would have approached Mariam expecting to engage intellectually with the issues raised in the play.

The dialectical structure of closet dramas is partially the product of the intellectual climate in which they were written. In the early modern period, argument was valued for its own sake, as an intrinsically worthwhile intellectual exercise. The rediscovery of classical authors fostered an interest in antilogistic modes of thought. As a result, rhetorical training became the cornerstone of the grammar-school curriculum. Students read Plato, Cicero, and Aristotle; works written by second- and fourth- century Greek teachers such as Theon and Aphthonius became the standard textbooks of composition. Instructors trained students to see different sides of an issue. Scholars practiced their ability to represent certain viewpoints by delivering orations and engaging in disputes as fictional personae. In early modern England, the classically based education in rhetoric conditioned individuals to have a complex understanding of the different sides of an issue and trained them to produce arguments in support of opposing positions.

The influence of early modern rhetorical education is evident in the *querelle de femmes*, the debate about women which flourished during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Although philosophers and theologians had disputed about the

nature of women for centuries, in the early modern period an unprecedented number of treatises on the subject were written and disseminated. The composition of antifemale satires and defenses of women became a common exercise in the universities. Linda Woodbridge notes that the debate provided a vehicle for individuals to display both their rhetorical skill and their classical learning (17). Both defendants and satirists supported their arguments by citing classical and biblical figures who exemplify women's innate virtue or vice. Satirists typically offered Medea, Helen of Troy, Delilah, and others as examples to illustrate that women are naturally lustful, shrewish, and untrustworthy. Defenders presented women such as Ruth, the Virgin Mary, Penelope, Rachel, and Deborah as evidence that women are constant and patient. The influence of rhetorical training is evident in authors' ability to present both sides of the issue: several men who wrote defenses of women also produced antifemale satires. Edward Gosynhill, for example, published two treatises around the year 1542. In The Schoolhouse of Women he asserts that women are lustful, untrustworthy, and vain. He argues that women's perverse nature is the result of Eve's creation from Adam's rib, an origin which makes women "Crooked", "Evil to rule, both stiff and sturdy [disobedient]" (148). In The Praise of All Women, Called Mulerium Paean Gosynhill presents the other side of the debate, portraying women as nurturing, hardworking, and patient. He argues that women should not generally be blamed for Eve's trespass, and counterpoints the Schoolhouse argument that women have a perverse nature by asserting that men, not women, are characteristically "stubborn and stiff" (163, 167). Occasionally both defenses and satires were incorporated in a single text. Some treatises presented alternative viewpoints in the form of a dialogue between two or more individuals who dispute about women's nature. Sir Thomas Elyot's Defence of Good Women (1540), for example, is structured as a discussion between two men, Caninius and Candidus. Caninius decries women, contending that "a woman is a creature unperfit, she therfore mai neuer be stable or constante" (Biii^{v}-

Biiii). His opponent Candidus champions women, citing, among others, Portia, Penelope, and Panthea as examples of womanly constancy.

The emphasis on argument which affected the character of non-dramatic discourses also influenced the structure of dramatic works. Charles McDonald notes that early modern authors studied and imitated the contemplative plays of Euripides and Seneca, and suggests that early modern drama is consequently characterised by a "dialectic tension based upon consciously antilogistic modes of thought and antithetical modes of expression" (104). Joel B. Altman suggests that a large body of early modern dramas may be thought of as "fictionalized realizations of questions" (2-3). He proposes that the rhetorical training that dramatists underwent led them to produce plays which cultivate "ambivalence and multiplicity of view" as well as "ethical ambiguities, intellectual ironies, and affective disjunctions" (8). Clearly, then, closet drama is not unique in its complex exploration of conflicting viewpoints.

An awareness of the dialectical nature of closet drama can help us to understand why, in Ferguson's words, Mariam's "ideological statement is so mixed, so contradictory" ("Running" 38). Ferguson observes that Cary "seems at times to mount a radical attack on the concept of the wife as the 'property' of her husband" and yet simultaneously "justif[ies], even . . . advocate[s], a highly conservative doctrine of female obedience to male authority" ("Spectre" 236).[16] Cary portrays a wife's resistance to tyranny sympathetically and advances fairly radical ideas about women's equality with men and women's capacity for virtue.[17] Yet several female characters in the play who disrupt the social order seem to be portrayed as villains, and Constabarus and the Chorus condemn their actions as wicked. Critics have generally understood the ambiguity in Mariam as evidence that Cary was ambivalent about women's worth and place in society. They do not consider that closet dramas are typically complex and ambiguous because they dramatise conflicting viewpoints. Cary gives expression to both sides of the debate about women. The Chorus plays an

essential part in this dialectic by voicing patriarchal dogma. As we have seen, its judgement is undermined by the contradictions in its precepts for wifely virtue and by its inconsistent appraisals of Mariam's moral standing. The Chorus thus serves as a means by which Cary challenges patriarchal ideology.

Cary's interrogation of patriarchal ideology in Mariam is not surprising, given the political impetus of closet drama. Shannon notes that "when Elizabeth Cary presented her ideas in the form of a closet drama," both "philosophical and political analysis would have been a part of her message" (146). Closet drama provides a forum not only for the exposition of political ideas, but also for political dissent (Gutierrez 237). Straznicky cites the experiences of Samuel Daniel and Fulke Greville as evidence of closet drama's topical relevance (112). Daniel dedicated his Philotas (1605) to Prince Henry, urging the analogy of past times to present; he was subsequently called before the Privy Council to answer an accusation that the play alluded to the Essex affair.[18] Greville destroyed a closet drama that he had based on the story of Antony and Cleopatra because he feared that it was "apt enough to be construed, or strained to a personating of vices in the present Governors, and government" (quoted in Larson 43). Closet dramas scrutinise the options available to an individual subjected to tyranny, exploring the conflict between one's civic duty to obey established authority and one's moral duty to act in accordance with one's conscience. The heroes of closest dramas choose to maintain their personal integrity, and are consequently executed for their insubordination. They meet their deaths with stoic resignation, renouncing worldly concerns. Straznicky notes that the stoic ethic has an "overt political charge" because the proponents of stoicism operate from a position of disempowerment; they cultivate an immunity to the assaults of external forces in an attempt to locate the center of power in the self (110). The stoic ethic's "contempt for prosperity and power" thus has "genuinely subversive" political implications (Straznicky 113-14).

Closet drama explores tyranny in both public and domestic realms. Gutierrez observes that the genre addresses "issues of government" in both the state and the family, "so that questions of duty and responsibility, loyalty and devotion have both political and domestic ramifications" (237). It has been widely observed that in early modern ideology the family was not conceptualised as a "private" entity isolated from "public" interests: instead, it had political significance because it was understood to be the founding unit of the state. The patriarchal family was a "little commonwealth", a microcosm which reflected the divinely ordained social order. According to this analogy, a husband was the head of a household as the king was the head of the state; a wife, in turn, was expected to acknowledge her innate inferiority to her husband and to subject herself to his authority. Closet dramas' exploration of domestic tyranny thus had political ramifications. By writing a play about a woman whose husband is her king, literally as well as figuratively, Cary highlights the problem of patriarchal absolutism in a context that gives it an explicitly political thrust.[19]

The dialectical nature of closet drama makes it ideally suited as a forum in which playwrights can interrogate political practice with a minimal danger of incriminating themselves. Lewalski observes that closet dramas "do not overtly sanction or encourage rebellion"; rather, their political significance "resides in the complexity and ambiguity with which issues of tyranny and rebellion are treated" (191). The dialectical nature of the genre "allow[s] for the clash of ideological positions and for the sympathetic representation of resistance and rebellion" (Lewalski 179). Authors "give extended expression to both sides of the dilemma" of a subject's duties to conscience and king (Shannon 145). Playwrights create characters who react to tyranny in different ways, allowing tyrants themselves to elaborate on the quandaries they face in governing. Because playwrights dramatise a number of perspectives, it is difficult to identify any single viewpoint as authorially sanctioned. The stoic heroes of closet dramas are punished for their defiance of established

authority, yet they are glorified because they maintain personal integrity. By locating the center of power in the self, stoic heroes paradoxically triumph over tyranny. Closet dramas thus challenge political ideology by recording stoic heroes' defiance of the status quo.

The Chorus plays an essential role in Cary's interrogation of patriarchal ideology because it voices patriarchal conceptions about women's worth and place in society, which are counterpointed by Cary's portrayal of Mariam. For example, the Chorus's conflation of female speech and sexual transgression is called into question because Mariam is both chaste and outspoken. The Chorus endorses the notion of sexual hierarchy, which is justified on the basis that women are naturally inferior to men. But Mariam is clearly Herod's moral superior: whatever flaws she may be guilty of, they pale in comparison to her husband's jealousy, inconstancy, and use of murder as a means to secure power. Mariam never repents her disobedience of her husband. Yet her execution is presented as a prefiguration of Christ's death, suggesting that her rebellion against Herod's tyranny has not marred her moral standing in divine eyes. At the time in which Mariam was composed, it would have been politically imprudent to challenge the basic hierarchical order of society without qualifying one's criticisms. By having the Chorus censure Mariam for leaving her marital "due unpaid" (V. i. 559), Cary forestalls the criticism to which she exposed herself in her challenge of the hierarchy of the sexes.

An awareness of the dialectical nature of closet drama is crucial especially to our understanding of Mariam's ending. Cary provides several alternative interpretations of the protagonist's death and moral standing. According to the Chorus, Mariam has been guilty of various moral shortcomings throughout the course of the play. From the Chorus's perspective, then, her execution is punishment for her transgressions of the boundaries of virtuous behaviour and for her failure to fulfil her wifely duty. Her outspoken voice is fittingly silenced by the end of the play. The

imagery and events surrounding Mariam's death, however, glorify her as a precursor of Christ. Her exaltation implies that she is morally pure, despite the Chorus's criticisms of her. However, I would argue that Mariam's exaltation as a type of Christ is ultimately undercut by her exchange with Doris in Mariam's final appearance. Waiting to be executed, Mariam seems finally to accept that her attitudes have caused her downfall. She admits that she has been vain, asking herself "Am I the Mariam that presum'd so much, / And deem'd my face must needs preserve my breath? / Ay, I it was that thought my beauty such, / As it alone could countermand my death" (IV. viii. 525-28). In addition, she confesses that she has lacked humility: "Had I but with humility been grac'd, / As well as fair I might have prov'd me wise: / But I did think because I knew me chaste, / One virtue for a woman might suffice" (IV. viii. 559-62). Mariam also seems to transcend her preoccupation with social class, although, as noted above, her words may be interpreted as her expectation that she will belong to a privileged class in heaven. While she declares that she does not envy "princes great in power, and high in birth" whose "birth must be from dust", she asserts that "In Heav'n shall Mariam sit in Sara's lap" (571-74). When Doris arrives, however, Mariam's behaviour does not display the change that one would expect would be the consequence of newly discovered self-knowledge. Mariam still relies on her beauty as a sign of her virtue, telling Doris that "If fair [Mariam] be, she is as chaste as fair" (582). Moreover, she still refers to herself as "guiltless", despite her earlier admission of pride (608). Finally, she responds to Doris's cursing of Mariam's children by expressing the hope that the curse will be returned upon Doris: "I hope the world shall see, / This curse of thine shall be return'd on thee" (625-26). This action particularly undercuts Mariam's consequent exaltation, since Cary would certainly have been aware that Mariam's reactive cursing of Doris qualifies her status as a morally perfect prototype of Christ.

The conflicting interpretations of Mariam's moral standing leave the reader with an ambiguous impression of the protagonist. Critics frequently cite the ambiguity of the ending as evidence that Cary was ambivalent about Mariam's rebellious stance, since it is unclear where authorial sympathies lie.[20] Gutierrez, alternatively, proposes that the ending of Mariam is an authorial strategy designed to lead the reader to engage with the text and draw her own conclusions. She argues that the rhetorical function of the ambiguous ending

> is to ask for either assent or criticism from an audience that . . . has observed and formed an opinion about the hero's actions . . . . Given the rhetorical foundation of the drama in such forms as debate, declamation, and dialogue, all of which require the reader's participation in order for some kind of closure to occur . . . this particular kind of didactic quality of Mariam is unsurprising (246).

I agree with Gutierrez's claim that the ambiguity of Mariam's ending is designed to lead readers to form our own opinions about the protagonist's moral standing. Critics who conclude that Cary is ambivalent because the play does not resolve all of the moral issues that it raises ignore the dialectical nature of closet drama. We must also remember that in the political climate in which Cary wrote, a subtly didactic approach was politically prudent.[21]

Working from the assumption that closet dramas typically "preach solutions to a problem", Gutierrez argues that Cary departs from generic conventions in presenting readers with an ambiguous ending that invites audience interaction (243; 246). But this didactic strategy is not unique to Cary's play Both Daniel and Greville, for example, employ ambiguity in the same way as does Cary.[22] It is generally assumed that closet drama is a didactic enterprise. Despite the genre's dramatisation of conflicting viewpoints, critics generally assume that authors intend their plays to be overtly didactic "instruction manuals" (Straznicky 111) or "rhymed political treatises" (Michel 10).[23] Faced with complexity and ambiguity, critics often

conclude that closet dramas are unsuccessful attempts at didacticism or that the plays' authors are ambivalent about the issues that they dramatise. Laurence Michel, for example, argues that the authors of closet dramas characteristically suffer from "confused political ideals" because their plays are ideologically contradictory (v). But it is possible for a play to be didactic without explicitly endorsing a single viewpoint. By juxtaposing opposing arguments, the authors of closet dramas invite readers to scrutinise the soundness of the arguments they present.

Cary raises the issue of didacticism in Mariam by having the Chorus invite the reader to consider the play's events as a "school of wisdom" (V. i. 294). In the final ode, the Chorus summarises the changes of fortune that have occurred over the course of the play. It concludes that

> This day's events were certainly ordain'd,
> To be the warning to posterity:
> So many changes are therein contain'd,
> So admirably strange variety.
> This day alone, our sagest Hebrews shall
> In after times the school of wisdom call.
>
> (V. i. 289-94)

The Chorus suggests that the changes which have occurred during the play offer a lesson, but it does not specify which lesson. In addition to the changes of fortune which the characters have experienced, there has also been a "strange variety" in the attitudes they have expressed. The inconsistent judgements of Herod and the Chorus itself exemplify this change. The Chorus is ironically unaware of the didactic impact of the "strange variety" in its statements. It has played an explicitly didactic role by prescribing behaviour for wives; yet the lessons that it attempts to instil in women are undermined by the inconsistencies and contradictions in its counsel. Although the Chorus intends to teach us about the behaviour proper to wives, what we learn is that patriarchal ideology is riddled with inconsistencies.

Ironically, in the same ode in which the Chorus emphasizes the "strange variety" in the play, it calls our attention to the critical approach which enables us to discover the inconsistencies in its judgement:

> Whoever hath beheld with stedfast eye,
> The strange events of this one only day:
> How many were deceiv'd, how many die,
> That once today did grounds of safety lay!
> It will from them all certainty bereave,
> Since twice six hours so many can deceive.
>
> (V. i. 259-63)

As we have seen, the Chorus itself fails to view Mariam's history with a "stedfast eye", as is amply illustrated by its inconsistent judgement of the protagonist. The Chorus's suggestion that readers who do view the play with an objective or critical eye will be confounded by the characters' failure to think critically is a fitting description of the effect evoked by the play. Again, the Chorus is ironically unaware of the significance of its words: if we appraise the play with a "stedfast eye", it will teach us things about the inconsistencies in patriarchal ideology that the Chorus never intended.

Chapter Four

The Chorus and the Importance of Critical Thought

I would argue that Cary deliberately prompts her readers to engage critically with the issues she raises in Mariam. Critical thought plays an important thematic role in the play: Cary's version of the Herod and Mariam story emphasises that Mariam's tragedy occurs because Herod never questions his assumptions about the relationship between women's behaviour and virtue. The butler's final words accuse Herod of failing to use critical judgement: "Go tell the King he trusted ere he tried, / I am the cause that Mariam causeless died" (V. i. 109-10). Other characters in the play also raise issues in ways which lead the reader to scrutinise their arguments. In her speech about the inequality of divorce laws, Salome poses rhetorical questions which invite a response: "Why should such privilege to men be given? / Or given to them, why barr'd from women then? / Are men than we in greater grace with Heaven? / Or cannot women hate as well as men?" (I. iv. 305-08). Constabarus, in his misogynist diatribe, asks if men do not "resist the will of Heaven, / When on [women's] wills like servants we attend?" (IV. vi. 343-44). The characters' questions lead readers to engage intellectually with their arguments.

The Chorus itself foregrounds the issue of critical thought in the second ode when it accuses individuals of credulously believing the rumour of Herod's death. The second ode differs from the other choral odes in that the Chorus is not concerned with prescribing behaviour for wives or chiding Mariam for transgressing the limits of its injunctions. Perhaps because it does not seem to belong with the Chorus's other arguments, the second ode has received no attention from commentators on the play. I would argue that because it explicitly raises the issue of critical thought, the second ode is central to our understanding of the play's dialectical construction. (For the sake of the following discussion, I will quote the ode here in full.)

To hear a tale with ears prejudicate,
It spoils the judgment, and corrupts the sense:
That human error, given to every state,
Is greater enemy to innocence.
It makes us foolish, heady, rash, unjust,
It makes us never try before we trust.

It will confound the meaning, change the words,
For it our sense of hearing much deceives:
Besides, no time to judgment it affords,
To weigh the circumstance our ear receives.
The ground of accidents it never tries,
But makes us take for truth ten thousand lies.

Our ears and hearts are apt to hold for good
That we ourselves do most desire to be:
And then we drown objections in the flood
Of partiality, 'tis that we see
That makes false rumours long with credit pass'd,
Though they like rumours must conclude at last.

The greatest part of us, prejudicate,
With wishing Herod's death do hold it true:
The being once deluded doth not bate
The credit to a better likelihood due.
Those few that wish it not, the multitude
Do carry headlong, so they doubts conclude.

They not object the weak uncertain ground,
Whereon they built this tale of Herod's end:
Whereof the author scarcely can be found,
And all because their wishes that way bend.
They think not of the peril that ensu'th,
If this should prove the contrary to truth.

On this same doubt, on this so light a breath,
They pawn their lives and fortunes. For they all
Behave them as the news of Herod's death
They did of most undoubted credit call:
But if their actions now do rightly hit,
Let them commend their fortune, not their wit.

(II. iv. 401-36)

The Chorus advocates the practice of questioning the truth of what one is told and suggests that critical scrutiny is a sign of "wit" or intelligence. It asserts that individuals credulously believe the news of Herod's execution because they desire his

death. Those few commentators who have mentioned this ode have assumed that the Chorus's criticism is directed solely at the characters in the play, and have not questioned the Chorus's statement that the characters "all / behave them as the news of Herod's death / They did of most undoubted credit call" (II. iv. 432).[24] In fact, several characters are sceptical of the rumour and fear that Herod will return to Jerusalem alive. The Chorus's suggestion that these characters lack "wit" ignores the misgivings that they express. In her opening monologue, Mariam assumes that the news of Herod's death may be merely a rumour; her memories of Herod's wrongdoings "have power, his death to make me bear, / Nay more, to wish the news may firmly hold" (I. i. 51-52). Doris, consulting with her son Antipater, postpones acting on her plans to attempt to regain the throne because she distrusts the rumour of the king's death: "Yet we will not return till Herod's end / Be more confirm'd. Perchance he is not slain" (II. iii. 260-61). Constabarus and Babas's sons almost come to blows because the latter hesitate to emerge from hiding until they are certain that Herod is really dead. One of Babas's sons says "Yet do I fear this tale of Herod's death / At last will prove a very tale indeed" (II. ii. 147-48) and wants to wait until "we of Herod's state the truth do hear" (II. ii. 154). Constabarus responds to his doubt by accusing Babas's son of cowardice for "doubt[ing] undoubted truth" (II. ii. 156). Although Babas's sons submit to Constabarus's pressure and allow their own existence to become public knowledge, their doubts persist that the news of Herod's death is a "false alarm" (II. ii. 208). Pheroras's reaction to the news that Herod is alive suggests that he has also doubted that the king is really dead. When Ananell announces that he brings "peaceful tidings", Pheroras immediately guesses that Herod has escaped execution (III. ii. 33-41).

The Chorus's readiness to accuse the characters of lacking critical judgement suggests that it is attempting to avoid the implications of its assertions. The Chorus initially defines the tendency to "hear a tale with ears prejudicate" as a "human error,

given to every state" (401; 403): preconceptions influence our perception of events, deceiving "our sense of hearing" (408) and "mak[ing] us foolish, heady, rash, unjust" (405). The Chorus's use of the first-person plural pronoun underscores the fact that, whether or not the Chorus is conscious of it, it is implicated in the erring human multitude. When the Chorus asserts that human nature leads us to assume that our preconceptions are correct, leading us to "never try before we trust", it includes itself in the same error of judgement that the butler ascribes to Herod (406). Furthermore, the Chorus's assertion that universal human prejudice "spoils the judgement" undermines the validity of its evaluation of the principal characters (402). As we have seen, the Chorus is frequently guilty of jumping to conclusions about Mariam's behaviour as a result of its preconceptions about women. Whatever awareness of its biases it exhibits in the second ode, the Chorus seems unable to follow its own advice during the remainder of the play.

A shift in the Chorus's use of pronouns over the course of the ode suggests that it becomes anxious about the implications which its admission of "partiality" has for its judgement (416). In the first four stanzas, the Chorus's censure is directed toward "we" and "us"; in the final two stanzas it suddenly identifies "they" and "them" as the object of its criticism. In the fourth stanza, the Chorus refers to "Those few" members of the community whose scepticism has been overcome by pressure from the majority as "they" (424). When, in the fifth stanza, the Chorus says "They not object the weak uncertain ground, / Whereon they built this tale of Herod's end" (425-26), it is unclear to whom the pronoun refers. It cannot refer to the same "they" as in the previous stanza, since "they" was defined by its critical scrutiny, a characteristic that the present "they" clearly lack. It is possible that the Chorus is now referring to the credulous multitude as "they"; but when in the final stanza the Chorus speaks of "them" "pawning their lives and fortunes" on the rumour of the king's death, it becomes evident that the Chorus is no longer referring to any part of the community to

which it belongs (432). I would suggest that the Chorus, belatedly realising that its argument about universal partiality undermines the validity of its own judgement, attempts to deflect attention away from itself and onto the principal characters in the play.

The Chorus's discourse on the importance of critical scrutiny serves to alert readers to the dangers of allowing our own prejudices to influence our judgements. The Chorus's definition of prejudiced judgement as a "human error, given to every state" implicates the play's readers in the failure to think critically. I would argue that Cary includes the Chorus's discourse on critical thought in the second ode as a way of subtly sensitising readers to the importance of maintaining a critical perspective on the conflicting viewpoints presented in the play. Ironically, the Chorus's advocacy of critical scrutiny also serves to alert the play's audience to the contradictions and inconsistencies in the Chorus's arguments about wifely virtue and to its biased judgement of the action of the play. While the Chorus may not be fully aware of the implications of its counsel, Cary certainly would have been.

Conclusion

I would like briefly to consider the Chorus's words about women's "usurpation" of "public language" in relation to Cary's position as a woman writer in the seventeenth century. Much critical commentary has been devoted to considering how Cary felt as a writer in a culture in which womanly virtue was equated with silence. Cary foregrounds the issue of the legitimacy of women's voices by writing a play in which the relationship between speech and virtue is central to the story. Mariam suffers because patriarchal ideology does not recognise that a woman may be outspoken yet chaste. Herod suspects his wife's fidelity because he interprets her conversation with Sohemus as a sign of sexual transgression. The Chorus accuses Mariam of desiring sexual "variety" because it conflates outspokenness with sexual license. In the third ode the Chorus censures Mariam for sharing her thoughts with individuals other than her husband. The Chorus states that any wife who "more than to her lord alone will give / A private word to any second ear" thereby "wounds her honour" (III. iii. 228-29, 232). The Chorus views public speech as a male prerogative: any woman who "seeks to be by public language grac'd" is guilty of "usurp[ing]" upon her husband's right to speak publicly (III. iii. 239-40).

Several critics have noted that the Chorus's comments on women's exercise of public language are relevant to Cary's position as a woman writer in the early modern period. Ferguson and Kennedy suggest that the third ode is a site where Cary struggles with the conflict between, on one hand, patriarchal restrictions on women's speech and, on the other, her own authorial exercise of public language. Kennedy notes that "The strict rules for wifely speech set out by the Chorus would preclude even the circulation of a manuscript like Mariam" (121) and suggests that the ode is evidence that Cary was "anxious about the circulation of a text depicting an angry, discontented wife who decides not to disguise her feelings" (124). Ferguson comments

that "Had Cary obeyed the rule of privacy set forth by her Chorus, she might have written a play, but we would not be reading it," and suggests that the third ode is "the moment in the drama where Cary most directly interrogates her play's own right to exist" ("Spectre" 243-44).[25] Ferguson is correct in stating that the third ode is the point in the play at which the issue of women's speech is addressed explicitly. But it is important to remember that, in another sense, Cary addresses the issue of women's speech very indirectly. The prescriptions for women's speech are pronounced by a constructed dramatic character whose viewpoint should not be identified with Cary's personal opinions. According to the Chorus's conservative perspective, Cary, as a woman, usurps the male right to exercise public speech. But the Chorus's viewpoint is not the only one offered in the play. Cary offers an alternative to the patriarchal dogma which equates women's speech with a lack of virtue by creating a protagonist who is outspoken yet chaste. I would argue that instead of interrogating her play's right to exist, Cary here interrogates the patriarchal restrictions on women's speech and the patriarchal assumption that women's speech is linked to transgressive sexuality. The Chorus's discourse on women's exercise of public language also serves a political function in Mariam. By using the Chorus to "censure" Mariam and to "censor" her play, Cary forestalls the criticism to which she exposes herself by exercising the "public language" forbidden by the Chorus and by early modern patriarchal society.

Endnotes

[1] I am using the term "patriarchy" specifically to denote the system of social organisation that existed in early modern England. I am indebted to the work of Gordon Schochet and Merry Wiesner for my definition of patriarchy. At the time in which Cary wrote, the political order was understood to have a familial origin. The patriarchal family was seen as a microcosm of state order, in which a husband governed his household as the king governed the realm. The authority of kings, husbands, and fathers was understood to be divinely ordained: God had endowed Adam with patriarchal authority at Creation, and kings were the successors to that power. An individual's disobedience to any authority figure was seen as contrary to God's law. Schochet notes that patriarchal theory "defended the claims of divine right absolutism on the ground that absolute monarchy alone enjoyed God's sanction because it was the form of government He had specifically selected when He created man" (12). This explanation for the origin of patriachal government served to naturalise the institution.

The patriarchal order necessarily had a profound impact on women's social and economic position in early modern England. The analogy between husband and king implies that as a subject owes obedience to the king, a wife is bound by duty to obey her husband. A wife had no legal identity separate from that of her husband and no redress under law for physical or social brutalisation by her husband. Wiesner notes that "A married woman was legally subject to her husband in all things; she could not sue, make contracts, or go to court for any reason without his approval" (31). Women's social dependence was doubled by their economic dependence on men: "all goods or property that a wife brought into a marriage and all wages she earned during the marriage were considered the property of her husband" (Wiesner 31). The hierarchal

nature of the spousal relationship is illustrated by the fact that a wife who killed her husband was charged with petty treason as well as murder.

2 Witherspoon asserts that in classical Greek tragedy the chorus is intended "to direct the thoughts of the reader or the audience, and to induce in them the proper mental state" (14). Michel similarly states that "the precise duty" of the chorus "is to direct the attitude of the audience" and concludes that the chorus in Daniel's Philotas "clearly follows the author's own feelings" (vii.). On the other hand, Cunliffe suggests that Senecan choruses bear little or no relation to the plays in which they appear, and "could be cut out without any injury to the plot, and in some cases might even be transferred from one tragedy to another without any loss of appropriateness" (34).

3 The authors of other closet dramas characterise their choruses in a similar way. The chorus of William Alexander's Darius (1603) consists of a group of Persians who witness the fall of its king and laments the ruin that has befallen the realm as a result. The action of Samuel Brandon's The Tragicomedy of the Virtuous Octavia (1598) is commented on by a chorus consisting of Roman citizens who struggle with the question of who is responsible for the unjust suffering of the play's heroine. In The Tragedy of Antoine (1592), Mary Sidney creates two choruses, a group of Egyptians and a group of Roman soldiers, in order to contrast the perspectives of conquerers and the conquered toward divine justice.

4 Weller and Ferguson note that the list of *dramatis personae* is missing from all but two extant copies of Mariam. They explain that the *dramatis personae* occupies the verso of the leaf in the quarto which bears the dedicatory sonnet; since the sonnet could be used to identify the anonymous author of the play, it was removed from most

extant copies of the play after its printing and the *dramatis personae* was lost as a result (44).

5 My argument that Cary uses the setting of Pre-Christian Palestine to criticise contemporary patriarchal ideology necessarily obscures the differences between cultural practices in ancient Judea and seventeenth-century England. Krontiris (81) and Travitsky (188) note that there is a marked similarity between patriarchal marriage systems in early modern England and ancient Judea. It is impossible to determine exactly how much Cary would have known about the differences between the two societies, but considering her extensive reading it is probable that she would have been aware of some of the differences. Early modern authors commonly utilize foreign locations as analogies for their homelands. By setting plays in geographically and temporally distant locations, authors could comment on contemporary political practice with relative impunity in a political climate which was generally intolerant of dissidence.

6 Ferguson notes that in the third ode the Chorus "virtually equates female speech . . . with unbridled sexual behavior" ("Spectre" 240).

7 Kennedy notes that the Chorus's ascription of "glory" to Mariam as a motive is unfounded, since "there is no suggestion that Mariam wants praise or fame . . . or that she wants to speak publicly" (123-24). Kennedy negotiates the inconsistency between Mariam's statements about her motives and the Chorus's assertion that Mariam desires public recognition for her virtue by projecting the Chorus's "troublesome" statements about public language onto Cary's situation as a woman writer in the seventeenth century: since "the Chorus's conclusions do not fit the play's events", they "make better sense if they address Cary's situation rather than Mariam's" (123). Kennedy

does not consider that the contradiction may be an authorial strategy intended to lead the reader of Mariam to question the Chorus's judgement.

8 Several critics have commented on the discrepancy between the Chorus's judgement of Mariam in the third ode and the action of the play. While the Chorus offers the opinion that Mariam would have "Been free from fear, as well as innocent" if she had not shared her thoughts with someone other than her husband (III. iii. 250), Belsey notes that "the play as a whole makes clear that what brings about Mariam's death is not her openness with other people but her spoken defiance of Herod himself" (173). Krontiris observes that the Chorus's conclusion "come[s] into contradiction with the overall implications of the play's actions"(87), and Ferguson states that the play's subsequent development renders the Chorus's opinion "absurd" ("Spectre" 242). Lewalski notes that it is ironic that "Mariam's trouble stems . . . from the one kind of speech they [the Chorus] allow -- private speech to her own husband" (198).

9 Boyd Berry notes that "the Chorus persistently judges Mariam, just as Herod does, abruptly" (263). He proposes that the inconsistency in the Chorus's judgement is caused by its "infection" with Herod's "lunacy": "the patriarch is crazy and the world he dreams he controls is fully infected by his disease" (270). However, Berry does not explore what Cary's creation of a "lunatic" patriarch might imply about patriarchal ideology as a whole.

10 Cotton Pearse notes that Salome's vigorous assertion of her rights "is villainess talk, but not even Renaissance villainesses were talking about women's rights and equitable divorce laws" (604). Krontiris suggests that Doris's reproof of Mariam "queries legal definitions of adultery and the text threatens to break into a validated castigation of the double standard" (91).

11 Karen Raber suggests that Mariam is a "critique of an absolutist political system . . . which generates rather than resolves instability in its subjects" (340). She argues that Mariam initially has difficulty establishing a stable and constant self because she derives her sense of self from patriarchal ideals (331). In contrast, Salome exploits the patriarchal order to attain what she wants "by recognizing its inconsistencies, [and] refusing to allow any code to define and contain her" (336).

12 Ferguson suggests that "although the Chorus continues to argue that Mariam should have submitted to Herod's authority" the play "reconceives, and simplifies, the ideological conflict between the Chorus's perspective on wifely duty and Mariam's by presenting her death as an allegorical version of Christ's crucifixion" ("Spectre" 244). Ferguson does not, however, comment on what the conflict between the action of the play and the Chorus's interpretation of that action might suggest about the authority of the Chorus's judgements.

13 On pages 28-31 and 44-46 below, I address the question of whether Mariam's behaviour merits martyrdom.

14 Raber remarks on the "extraordinary discordance, even logical incoherence" in the Chorus's prescriptions for a wife's surrender of selfhood (328). By asserting that a wife should "Bare herself of power as well as will", Raber notes that "The chorus seeks to ensure that legal doctrine will extend into that place conceived of as the women's interior, her 'self' figured as her mind . . . . But there is no way to simultaneously imagine a proprietary selfhood for women before marriage which would allow them to perform such internalizing, figured in the [Chorus's] speech as acts of giving and reserving, and the absolute effacement of that self in marriage" (328).

15 Krontiris emends "prou'd" to "proud" when quoting the Chorus's speech in her article, but she does not provide reasons for the emendation (87). It is unclear whether the apostrophe was a printer error or elision.

16 In a similar vein, Travitsky argues that "Cary simultaneously mouths pious platitudes on such woman's duties as submissiveness, loyalty, and chastity . . . and portrays plucky resistance toward those duties" ("Husband-Murder" 187).

17 Krontiris notes that Cary questions "the validity of a universal standard on wifely behaviour and simultaneously challenges the assumption behind this standard -- that man is necessarily woman's moral superior." (83); Lewalski argues that by creating a heroine who is chaste yet outspoken, Cary points out the absurdity of the "chaste, silent, and obedient" triad of virtues by "inviting sympathetic identification with a heroine who is chaste but manifestly neither silent nor obedient" (200).

18 Elizabeth I had a tempestuous relationship with Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex. Essex was one of the Queen's favourites for many years. He flattered and flirted with the Queen, and she, charmed, forgave him his repeated offences. In February of 1601, forbidden from the court and nearing financial ruin, Essex attempted to stage a coup d' etat. It was quashed and Essex was executed as a result. Daniel was a supporter of Essex whose sympathetic portrayal of a man accused of treason raised the suspicions of the political elite. Greville evidently thought that it would be politically imprudent to produce a play which depicted heads of state compromising government

in order to indulge their passions, since the topic was too suggestive of Essex's dalliance with Elizabeth.

19 I agree with Straznicky's observation that the "unself-conscious biographical readings" of Mariam which have dominated commentary on the play have obscured the political significance of Cary's work. Straznicky notes that "the move to domesticate Elizabeth Cary and The Tragedy of Mariam is . . . ill-considered, as is the correlative move to view her choice of genre as evidence of a private, inward-turning act of composition" (107). Straznicky focuses on Cary's use of stoic discourse, suggesting that Mariam's death has a political impact on the state because her death leaves Herod unfit to rule. Ferguson proposes that Cary's decision to specify the mode of Mariam's execution as beheading had contemporary political significance. She suggests that the detail "conjures up the ghost of Mary Queen of Scots, whose son ruled England when Cary wrote her play and who was in the eyes of many English Catholics a victim of Protestant tyranny", as well as implying "a possible similarity between Mariam and Anne Boleyn, killed by a royal husband who had broken with the Catholic church to divorce his first wife and who was explicitly linked to the tyrant Herod by some of his disapproving subjects" ("Spectre" 245).

20 See, for example, Travitsky, p. 187; Ferguson, p. 243; Belsey, p. 174; Kennedy, 125.

21 Krontiris suggests that the political and social climate in which Cary wrote affected the playwright's portrayal of her heroine. She argues that the lack of closure in the play's ending, which she describes as "faltering", is the result of "the author's attempt to contain what might otherwise offend . . . . Much of her reservation and

unease . . . can be read as an attempt on her part to remain *inoffensively* assertive" (89-90).

22 The hero of Daniel's Philotas is presented sympathetically. While Philotas is executed for treason, he is guilty only of imprudence and egocentrism. Moreover, he exhibits a certain personal integrity in his refusal to become involved in the intrigues of the court and he is devoted to the welfare of the state. Alexander subjects him to a sham trial, at which Philotas maintains his innocence. Although Philotas does finally confess to being involved in the treasonous conspiracy, the nuntius who reports his confession suggests that it was the result of torture. Laurence Michel observes that Philotas's "unheroic, self-accusatory death" results in an "inconclusive conclusion" because readers are unsure of how to interpret Philotas's moral standing (vii). Michel further argues that the lack of resolution is caused by Daniel's inability to create an ideologically coherent play: like the other authors of closet dramas, "Daniel does not succeed in arriving at any positive theory of government -- he rather takes the critic's way of attacking abuses at the opposite extremes of tyranny and anarchy" (16). His assertion that Daniel fails to provide a unified "theory of government" assumes that Daniel intends to be overtly didactic, instead of providing a complex exploration of tyranny from which readers may draw their own conclusions. Ironically, while Michel suggests that the ambiguity of Daniel's play diminishes its political thrust, Daniel was summoned to appear before the Star Chamber precisely because his play was not ambiguous enough. Critics who expect closet dramas to be overtly didactic do not take into account the political climate in which they were composed.

A similar lack of resolution in the ending of Greville's Mustapha suggests that Greville also uses ambiguity as a way of inviting the reader to engage critically with the viewpoints he dramatises. In the play, the Turkish king Soliman executes his son because he fears that Mustapha has treasonous ambitions. Mustapha reacts to his

father's tyranny with stoic resignation. The nobility of his acceptance of death is undercut by the final choral passage, however, in which the Chorus Tartarorum and the Chorus Sacerdotum ridicule the idea of abandoning the sensual world for the hope of a spiritual existence. Joan Rees notes that while Mustapha "believes absolutely in a world beyond", the sceptical, anti-religious Chorus Sacerdotum "jeers at the religion for which Mustapha embraces suffering and death" (169, 179). Readers are left with an ambiguous impression of the hero's actions. Jonathan Dollimore asserts that because "In Mustapha there is no unequivocal damnation for the evil protagonists, no wholesale repentance, no recourse to poetic justice", the play "disconfirms its own attempt at formal and ideological coherence" (123). I would argue that the ambiguous ending is intended to lead readers to draw their own conclusions about the worth of Mustapha's actions, based on the arguments presented in the play.

23 A notable exception is Altman, who suggests that the early modern fascination with antilogistic modes of thought inspired authors to produce "plays of inquiry" (27). Such dramas do not resolve the questions that they raise, but rather end in "comprehensive multiplicity", offering alternative interpretations to questions which may be synthesised by audiences (25). Altman argues that the dramas have a "much wider moral function than has commonly been supposed": "the plays functioned as media of intellectual and emotional exploration for minds that were accustomed to examine the many sides of a given theme, to entertain opposing ideas, and by so exercising the understanding, to move toward some fuller apprehension of truth that could be discerned only through the total action of the drama. . . . the fruits of this play of mind were intended to be realized in action, through the intellectual and spiritual enrichment of the citizens of the polity" (6).

[24] Berry states that in the second ode, the Chorus censures Mariam for listening "'with ears prejudicate' because she, like all the other characters, believed rumours" (263), although the Chorus never identifies Mariam as the object of its criticism. Cotton Pearse apparently refers to the Chorus's second ode when she speaks of the "constant pointers" that "remind us that the characters believe the rumour of Herod's death because they wish it" (603). In fact, only the Chorus calls the reader's attention to the principal characters' response to the news; the characters themselves express doubts about Herod's death. Lewalski likewise accepts the Chorus's evaluation of the principal characters' "credulous belief": "At the end of Act II the chorus points out the 'weake uncertaine ground' for the report of Herod's death, so eagerly believed by most because it sorts with their desires" (196). Weller and Ferguson state that the second ode "counsels . . . against the ready and wishful reliance on reports of Herod's death in which nearly all the characters are implicated" (36).

[25] Cotton Pearse assumes that the attitude toward women's speech expressed by the Chorus is Cary's personal opinion: see page 14, above. Goreau likewise identifies the Chorus's sentiments with Cary's personal opinion and cites the ode as evidence that Cary had conflicting feelings about publishing her play (Whole Duty 13-14).

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