

**WOMEN'S STUDIES CELEBRATION**  
Women's History Month 2006

**NOMINATION: Papers and projects done in completion of course work for Spring, Summer and Fall 2005 eligible for nomination. Students do not need to be enrolled Fall 2005 or Spring 2006 to be eligible.**  
(Students are encouraged to identify works they would like nominated and approach their professor to initiate the process.)

Instructor: Erna Kelly \_\_\_\_\_ Dept.: English \_\_\_\_\_

Course Number and Name: Engl 454 Early Brit Lit Seminar— \_\_\_\_\_ Semester complete: Spring 05 \_\_\_\_\_

Title of Nominated Work: "The Gender of Genre: Elizabeth Cary's Subversion of Renaissance Tragedy." \_\_\_\_\_

Pick one-

**CATEGORY:**

**Sampson:**

Undergraduate Research Paper

Undergraduate Project

Graduate

See

Olson

Kessler

Turell

Belter

(The judges retain the right to reassign categories for all nominated works.)

**STUDENT INFORMATION:**

Name Lindsey Brandrup \_\_\_\_\_

Email Brandrla@uwec.edu \_\_\_\_\_ Year/Major: Senior/ Double mjr: Engl Educ & Spanish Educ \_\_\_\_\_

Local Address 908 S. Barstow St. Apt. 1, Eau Claire, WI 54701. \_\_\_\_\_

Local Phone 715-864-9848 \_\_\_\_\_

**\*\*WHY DO YOU, THE INSTRUCTOR, RECOMMEND THIS AS AN EXEMPLARY STUDENT PAPER/PROJECT? (Attach a separate sheet.)**

As the nominating instructor, please notify the student and ask them to turn in the paper, or attach to your nomination form.

.....  
**Awards are sponsored by the UW-Eau Claire Foundation, Helen X. Sampson Fund, and by private individuals. Research involving human subjects must conform to the guidelines given by the Institutional Research Board. Contact Research Services, 836-3405, with questions.**

**Submission deadline is February 13, 2006.**

To: The Women's Studies Awards Committee  
From: Erna Kelly, English Department  
1/20/06

I am nominating Lindsey Brandrup's "The Gender of Genre: Elizabeth Cary's Subversion of Renaissance Tragedy" for the Helen Sampson Undergraduate Research Paper Award because it is an extremely thorough, well-thought-out argument for gendered differences in tragedy and because it introduces to readers an important but not well known female playwright and contemporary of Shakespeare. Although many have argued that Shakespeare has created powerful heroines, few have noted how thinly and stereotypically he has sketched the central female character in *Othello*. By reading Cary's *The Tragedy of Miriam* in light of *Othello* and vice versa, Lindsey not only shows that Cary creates a more multidimensional central female character in her tragedy than does Shakespeare but also points out the socio-political importance of "domestic" tragedy, a genre that has been to a degree devalued because of its association with the feminine. Lindsey examines a wide range of critical/theoretical approaches to both plays as well as each play's language and action, sifting through this material with skill and making subtle distinctions before reaching her conclusions. Finally, I would like to add that although the period in which Cary and Shakespeare lived has been called the Renaissance by some historians, its more recent label, Early Modern, is equally or perhaps more apt, since so much of how we see the world today has its roots in the thought, art, and literature of the 1500's and 1600's. As long as Shakespeare holds the position he does in our literary culture, analyses like Lindsey's are important. Her points about gendered social structures and behavioral expectations, unfortunately, still have

**resonance in the twenty-first century, double-standards, censored speech and domestic violence.**

Lindsey Brandrup

Dr. Kelly

English 454

5 April 2005

The Gender of Genre: Elizabeth Cary's Subversion of Renaissance Tragedy

While Elizabeth Cary's *The Tragedy of Mariam* and Shakespeare's *Othello* have many similarities in the way of character, plot, and theme, their accordance with or deviance from the genre of Renaissance tragedy is one point of departure and an interesting area of study. What makes this examination interesting is the extent to which the author's gender politicizes the pieces he and she are writing. When looking through the lens of patriarchal privilege *Othello* would not be read as a political piece in terms of gender construction. Yet any work contextualized within a struggle, in this case the struggle for gender equity, is given a political stance: either it perpetuates the status quo or it protests it. Because *Othello* fits easily into the norms of the domestic tragedy genre, it is from Cary's work that we can begin to study the role of gender in subverting genre.

Both plays are described as domestic tragedies because the center action revolves around the disputes of a married couple. In *The Tragedy of Mariam* King Herod of Jerusalem has returned home after being presumed dead only to be led to believe that his second wife, Mariam, was unfaithful to him. In *Othello* the General Othello is led to the same belief about his wife. Both men believe these accusations and kill their wives-- Herod by his word and Othello by his hand--only to discover their innocence in the end. The basic premise, then, is apparently similar. In addition, there exists in both plays a character responsible for implanting or promoting these knowingly false accusations. In

*The Tragedy of Mariam*, this character is Salome; in *Othello* this character is Iago. Both of these characters construct means through which they achieve their own ends: revenge and destruction. This manipulation of plot further exemplifies these plays as domestic tragedies. While such a term has oftentimes been written off as trite for the subject of a play, the conflicts within these tragedies can and should be viewed as a microcosm of gender relations during Renaissance England (Callaghan 10).

Of course the immediate reasoning behind the dismissal of a play termed “domestic” is its identification with the feminine and the sexist assumption that anything feminine is of little importance for theatrical representation, let alone critical or analytical study. What those who hold this opinion fail to see is that domestic tragedy can be a readily available representation of the political world. This was especially true during Renaissance England where problems within the hierarchy of the family suggested problems within the governmental hierarchy.

The governmental and societal hierarchies place the king at the head of the state. In the familial context this structure is compressed and the husband becomes the head of the family. Dympna Callaghan, author of *Woman and Gender in Renaissance Tragedy*, cites the “gender system” as being the one of the keystones to the building of hierarchy on a large scale (10). The “gender system” assumes female subservience to males. Callaghan asserts that the maintenance of this system in hierarchical governments such as that of Renaissance England was built upon and supported by the reinforcement of other hierarchically arranged institutions such as marriage and family, describing them as the “social manifestations of gender systems” (10). If one accepts this idea, then the extent to which gender assumptions have been imbedded in the creation of the popular institutions

of this society makes it very difficult to identify the workings of the “gender system,” let alone combat them (Callaghan 10). While many of the obvious manifestations of believed female subservience have recently been combated in countries influenced by the political and societal structures of Renaissance England, the depth and reach of these assumptions (and thus the real implications) are only beginning to be explored. In light of this, it must be concluded that the domestic tragedy took for granted the functionality of the “gender system” as an influence of and on the hierarchies of Renaissance England<sup>1</sup> even though the system may not have been universally accepted (10). In order for the domestic tragedy to be effective, the roles of the subservient female and the reigning male must be assumed because the plot of the tragedy relies on some thwarting of this system. Callaghan again illustrates this by explaining that “gender opposition,” which is creating binaries out of certain qualities and then assigning positive or negative associations to each set, is often at the center of the domestic tragedy; she further asserts that the function of binaries “in terms of the dominant ideology, is to reinforce the status quo” (11). It appears, then, that domestic tragedies of the Renaissance do not only develop out of the established ideology, they seek also to reinforce it.

Because each of the plays examined in this paper focuses on a marital relationship, it is useful to explore this structure in terms of the “gender system” observed by Callaghan (10). It is clear that the husband is the head of the family, meaning that he has authority over his wife and, if there are any, children. This structure was very efficient for those who wished to propagate the hierarchy of Renaissance England, as

---

<sup>1</sup> The Renaissance time frame is also commonly referred to as the Early Modern Period. Thus the terms are often applied interchangeably. For purposes of this paper, the term Renaissance England has been applied throughout. It is interesting to note the extent to which the Renaissance term may exclude feminine experience whilst women writers of the Early Modern Period may be more common in academia.

Callaghan illustrates, “The fact that domestic rebellion occurs primarily over the issue of marriage is further evidence that marriage is the means by which patriarchal power reproduces itself” (21). In this situation the woman is placed in a position of duality from which not only is there no apparent outlet, there is no correct fulfillment of her role. Within the family, the woman is subservient to the man; yet she is responsible for the upbringing and future of her children, a fundamental role in society. What this means is that she ultimately becomes an agent of propagation by bringing up males to eventually dominate females.

In *Othello* it is largely accepted that Desdemona’s disobedience of her father is illustrated in the opening lines; however, the meaning of her transgression is not universally interpreted. Callaghan states that Desdemona’s behavior is not extreme because it was “in marriage that parents were most often defied” (21). In an interesting examination of this act, Sandra Logan, author of “Disordered State in *Othello*,” argues that Desdemona’s transgression without severe and immediate consequences illustrates how “the Senate establishes its willingness to reconfigure conventional models of domestic social organization in the pursuit of Venice’s international strength and viability” (353). I agree that the incident appears to be quickly mended, but when Logan claims that by the affairs of the state taking precedence over domestic affairs women are allotted more autonomy, I think she makes an oversimplified assumption about the actual power that Desdemona has. The Senate is merely acting out of its own self-interest rather than any respecting any right or privilege belonging to Desdemona. Essentially, the city/state is vulnerable and Othello’s help is needed. It’s not that the Senate is excusing her behavior because they didn’t feel directly threatened; it’s that her husband is Othello.

But Logan argues that Desdemona “asserts her autonomy and self-determination even as she declares her subordination to her new husband” when she is called to testify that she went with Othello by her own free will and not because he used magic on her; Logan interprets this as proof that the actual transgression is not important but rather it is the means through which the transgression occurred that is important (361). This, she states, demonstrates that the domestic establishment was not as powerful as that of the state and therefore women could break societal expectations as long as they didn’t directly challenge the state (361). What Logan fails to observe is that even though Desdemona’s disobedience is not punished directly, it is not taken lightly; it is used by men throughout the play to evidence her unruly nature and thus her ability to be unfaithful to Othello.

Desdemona’s disobedience is later mentioned or alluded to in at least two important incidences, the first of which occurs when Othello and Desdemona are preparing for their voyage to Venice and Brabantio calls to Othello, “Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see. / She has deceived her father, and may thee” (1.3.293-294). Her transgression is mentioned again by Iago who uses it as “evidence” that Desdemona is capable of infidelity, “She did deceive her father, marrying you” (3.3.206). These incidences do not support Logan’s argument that Desdemona’s action was not important in and of itself, rather they illustrate its detrimental impact on her reputation. The latter contention is cemented by Othello when he disregards that Desdemona disobeyed her father to be with him. He forgets, or chooses to ignore, that it was his person she was defending and he chooses to view her behavior as troublesome in a macrocosmic way by pinning it against the hierarchical structure of Renaissance England. Furthermore, the power Logan gives to Desdemona in saying that she is “asserting her autonomy and self-

determination” is not even recognized by Desdemona: rather she follows the path of subordination created for her by the state in order to procreate and perpetuate the status quo. Her speech does not demonstrate autonomy, but a transition from one lord to another:

My noble father

I do perceive here a divided duty.

To you I am bound for life and education...

But here's my husband

And so much duty as my mother showed

To you, preferring you before her father

So much I challenge that I may profess

Due to the Moor my lord” (1.3.182-183; 187-191).

Even though Logan emphasizes that Desdemona has at least chosen who she is going to marry and therefore exerted independence momentarily, she fails to see this action in the context of the play as a whole and therefore fails to recognize its true significance.

Desdemona’s transgression is an action that, according to Theresa Kemp, “conflicts with conventional early modern gender expectations and results in larger social disruptions that occur on several fronts in the play” (459). Yet even if Desdemona’s action was a relatively common occurrence, its lack of acceptance is apparent in the devastating repercussions, which, in her case, was the ultimate consequence of death.

This pattern of transgression and consequence is echoed in *The Tragedy of Mariam* through Mariam’s action and Herod’s response. King Herod is responsible for the deaths of Mariam’s family of origin during his quest for power. Mariam knows this to

be true and harbors a deep hate for him; however, she laments his death when she hears of it. It is at this point that we first view the duality with which she struggles. This schizophrenic role is illustrated in her first soliloquy, "You wept indeed, when on his worth you thought / But joyed that slaughter did your foe destroy" (1.1.11-12). This one line demonstrates the bantering that goes on in her head throughout her entire soliloquy; she doesn't know to whom she should express her loyalty: her husband and king or her family of origin. At this point her internal struggle becomes external and her duality symbolized by the entrance of her birth mother and Salome, Herod's sister. The first lines spoken by her mother are "What means these tears? My Mariam doth mistake / The news we heard did tell the tyrant's end" (1.2.1-2). In stark contrast, Salome believes them to be celebrating Herod's death and says:

More plotting yet? Why, now you have the thing

For which so oft you spent your suppliant breath;

And Mariam hopes to have another king.

Her eyes do sparkle joy for Herod's death. (1.3.1-4)

The fact that she is being pulled from both directions and cannot decide her own place is interesting considering she is the Queen of Judea.

It is clear that the familial hierarchy is contradictory in its juxtaposition of women's roles of both power and servitude and that each of these plays illustrates that this confusion and contradiction leads to destruction of these women; yet the domestic tragedy in the Renaissance traditionally ignored the point of view of the victim. Instead it sought to illustrate the catastrophic events following even a minor transgression within the set system, in this case the gender system. One might assume that Elizabeth Cary

chose to subvert the traditional genre in order to create a space for women as the characters of tragedy and, perhaps, as the writers of tragedy. Early women writers typically subvert drama for two reasons, one of which being that they don't find that the existing genre fits their experiences; the other reason is that they lacked the education to follow the complexities of the genre (Kelly "Re: Topic Choice"). Since it is quite clear that the second reason doesn't apply to Cary her intentions most likely fall in the category of the former (Jordan and Carroll 1276).

The traditional characteristics of Renaissance tragedy include several key concepts. A tragedy involves an elevated treatment of plot and character in which a tragic hero (who is usually male though not always) becomes isolated because he or she is at odds with either gods or with society. The tragic hero or heroine is someone who is placed above those surrounding him or her; he or she is someone perceived as great; however, he or she is small in comparison with the universe. In this way the tragedy simultaneously shows human greatness and human insignificance (Kelly "Characteristics"). W.H. Auden, Shakespearean expert, would add that the tragedy "assume[s] that the tragic figure is a great or good man suffering from a flaw that brings him to destruction" (195). While Auden's claim is not universally applied, in the case of *Othello* it can be argued. In addition, time becomes one of the most important elements because the tragedy often lies in the fact that the timing is off or someone just misses an important moment. Because of this the play ultimately ends in catastrophe with an enormous sense of loss or waste.

Although *Othello* adheres closely to the characteristics traditionally associated with tragedy, *The Tragedy of Mariam* subverts this genre in a number of ways. The most

obvious way Cary deviates from the norm of the genre is by setting up the play from the point of view of Mariam, a woman and a wife. This simple change, however, has far-reaching implications in terms of gender and genre. Mariam is a character that is alive and multifaceted, as opposed to the often binary representations of women in tragedy as either passive and helpless or strong and belligerent. She is the one we sympathize with in this play, but more than that, we are able to empathize with her; in the case of Desdemona, empathy is sometimes hard to evoke because her point of view is not offered.

One of the ways in which we come to know Mariam is through a series of soliloquies. By their very nature and basic function, the soliloquy serves to bring the audience into the minds of the characters. In this way, the very act of Mariam speaking in a soliloquy adds dimension to her personality; it allows the audience to see another side of her. In fact, the play begins with a soliloquy which sets the stage for her dilemma. Rather than thrown into the world of Herod, we are thrown deep into the thoughts of Mariam.

In this way the first view we have of *her* world and *her* dilemma is through *her* eyes; that is, we come to see her world as she comes to see it. In contrast, Desdemona is never given a soliloquy; i.e., she has no such space from which we can view her. Because of this we learn about her dilemmas and her future before she does. By creating the play from Mariam's point of view not only does Cary create a vivid female character as the center of the play, but she also complicates the entire structure of the traditional genre.

Traditionally the lead character in the drama is not the one being examined by the rest of the world (Gruber 397). In *Othello*, Othello is the main character, or maybe it's

Iago, but they are also the ones seeking out information. They are the observers, the agents of action; the rest of the characters' lives depend upon their conclusions. In seeing the play from Mariam's point of view, we are as she is, in the position of other. Elizabeth Gruber illustrates this point further:

Mariam disrupts conventional tragic patterns, complicating the relationship between subject and object. While tragic heroes typically enjoy the privileges of seeking knowledge, and are thus endowed with subjectivity, Mariam herself is the focal point of an investigation undertaken by her husband. (397)

It makes sense that Cary would structure the play this way because she is able to relate to the feelings of being the one in question more so than being the one questioning. In her own life, Cary's conversion to Catholicism and her general education and writing talent certainly would have made her subject to examination and criticism. Constance Jordan and Clare Carroll, in an introduction to *The Tragedy of Mariam*, closely associate Mariam and Cary in saying that, "The heroine's struggle between obedience to her husband and fidelity to herself may be related to the author's own crisis of conscience" (1277).

Gruber explains this suspicion of any female exertion of independence as being caused by men's lack of and eternal quest for "knowing" a woman (394). Both husbands are confronted by the rumors of their wives' infidelity and both take it upon themselves to find out the truth in the matter. Their wives' insistence of innocence is of little consequence. Rather the men are quick to believe the ideas put in their heads and instead of seeking more logical ways of discovering the truth they act rashly and kill their wives.

Harold Bloom contends that all Othello would have had to do was sleep with his wife to find out that she was innocent since they had not consummated their relationship. Bloom states, “Desdemona and Othello, alas, scarcely know each other, and sexually do not know each other at all...[Othello] is incapable of resolving his doubts through the only sensible course of finally bringing himself to bed Desdemona” (460). While Bloom’s contention is thoroughly substantiated, its importance in this paper isn’t to create a stir about whether or not the couple did indeed consummate their marriage, but rather to illustrate the availability and range of solutions that could have existed for these men. Theresa Kemp’s assertion that “a wife’s *reputation* for unchastity is all the evidence needed to conflate seeming with being in the community’s mind” illustrates how Renaissance communities in general and the husbands specifically project their ideas and knowledge onto their wives thus forcing them to exist only in the position of the silenced other (*italics mine*) (458).

Despite Cary’s attempts to counter Miriam’s (and thus women’s) silencing, she does not spare her life. While some critics see the play’s conclusion as upholding the status quo, I see it as a realistic representation of the time. By not sparing Mariam the way that Desdemona is not spared, Cary maintains a realistic reflection of her society and therefore the play cannot be written off as fantastical or idealistic. In this way, Mariam’s death makes an even greater impact on our relationship with her and makes Cary’s subversion more powerful. While Desdemona’s death in *Othello* is still tragic, but because her presence has been so objectified the audience isn’t as attached to her. She is essentially used by Iago as a means of obtaining his revenge. Because of this, she becomes the object of Iago’s speeches to Othello rather than having her own speech.

This observation leads to another way in which Cary subverted the genre of Renaissance tragedy: by subverting the implications of women's speech. The Chorus serves as a particularly interesting point of examination in *The Tragedy of Miriam* because it represents the voice of the general population, expressing the beliefs of Renaissance society in England in terms of gender, marriage, chastity, and speech. The Chorus generally critiques or forewarns the actions and thoughts of other characters in the play. In *Othello* there is no chorus other than the imbedded one which speaks through the words and actions of each of the characters, but this serves to the same end; however, by using the Chorus in *Tragedy of Miriam*, Miriam's duality is reinforced. In doing so, the Chorus almost satirizes the impossible nature of the exaggerated demands placed on women, many of which are beyond their control. For example, in critique of Miriam's behavior the Chorus emphasizes the duties of women:

'Tis not enough for one that is a wife  
 To keep her spotless from an act of ill;  
 But from suspicion she should free her life,  
 And bare herself of power as well as will.  
 The wife her hand against her fame doth rear,  
 That more than to her lord alone will give  
 A private word to any second ear. (3.3.96-99; 108-110)

Here not only does a woman have to be chaste, she has to make sure that in everyone else's opinion she has not been thought to be otherwise. Raber asks, "How does a wife accomplish this task?" ("Dramatic" 3) She does so by speaking only to her husband, and to no one else. This statement illustrates the beliefs about women's speech popular in

Renaissance England: they should remain silent or direct it only to their husbands. As Raber points out, “In church, at home, wherever she might open her mouth, a woman’s speech threatened male ‘authority’ and contradicted ideals of feminine ‘subjection’” (“Dramatic” 3). Here again Cary diverges from Shakespeare in her representation of women’s speech. While the association of chastity and speech is upheld according to Renaissance ideals in *Othello*, it is subverted in *The Tragedy of Miriam*.

In *Othello* the action, to some extent, revolves around discovering whether or not Desdemona has been chaste. Using the Renaissance assumption that female silence equates chastity (unless speaking to one’s husband), one can trace the path of Desdemona’s destruction despite her innocence. Even though this path is manipulated and in some cases directed entirely by Iago, he wouldn’t be able to navigate it had the foundation not existed. Iago is a character who understands more than anyone, except Miriam’s Salome, about how to manipulate the patriarchal assumptions. He demonstrates this to us at the end of Act II when he plots to use Desdemona’s helping Cassio to make her look guilty: “So will I turn her virtue into pitch / And out of her own goodness make the net / That shall enmesh them all” (2.3.309-311). Despite Desdemona’s good intentions when she tries to discuss Cassio’s plight with Othello, she is already guilty of opening her mouth to another man, Cassio. As stated by Elizabeth Gruber, the men in these plays harbor the fear that “verbal intercourse necessarily leads to the sexual kind” (5). However, despite Iago’s trickery in this situation the play makes clear that Desdemona’s chastity is shown to the audience through her lack of speech, which occurs mainly on behalf of Othello such as when she defends him against allegations of sorcery.

Othello himself states that Desdemona fell in love with him by listening to his war stories:

These things to hear  
 Would Desdemona seriously incline;  
 But still the house affairs would draw her thence,  
 Which ever as she could with haste dispatch  
 She'd come again, and with a greedy ear  
 Devour up my discourse. (1.3.146-151)

This was, in fact, the way in which Othello knew that Desdemona had interest in him. It also seems that it is why he was interested in her.

Despite Boyce's assertions that Desdemona is a "strong, outspoken woman," it is critical to examine for whom she is speaking. In the first scene Desdemona is asked to speak on Othello's behalf; she speaks in order to praise him and claim her love for him in order to assure her father that he has not tricked her into marrying him (1.3.190-191). Therefore, while in the minds of Othello and Iago Desdemona's speaking to Cassio has been seen as inappropriate, her innocence is demonstrated to the audience of the play.

In contrast, the first impression we get of Emilia, Iago's wife and Desdemona's lady in waiting, is that she is somewhat of a chatterbox. Iago is the one who claims this, despite Desdemona's defense. Even though he is seemingly playful, he uses the audiences' understanding of women and speech in Renaissance England to paint a bawdy picture of Emilia: "Come on come on. / You are pictures out of doors," he adds, "and huswives in your beds" (2.1.112-113; 115). This image is later expressed by Othello after he questions Emilia about Cassio and Desdemona's conversations. She answers

honestly and none of her answers imply that the two of them are engaging in suspicious behavior; however, instead of believing her he writes her off as a simpleton: “She says enough; yet she’s a simple bawd / That cannot say as much. / This is a subtle whore / A closet lock and key of villainous secrets” (4.2.22-25). Despite the fact that Emilia was telling the truth at this point, she is ultimately shown as an example of how loose words signify loose women when she admits to Desdemona that she would cheat on her husband:

*Desdemona:* Wouldst thou do such a deed for all the world?

*Emilia:* Why, would not you?

*Desdemona:* No, by this heavenly light!

*Emilia:* Nor I neither by this heavenly light;

I might do’t as well i’ the dark.

*Desdemona:* Wouldst thou do such a deed for all the world?

*Emilia:* The world’s a huge thing. It is a great price

For a small vice (4.3.64-71).

If the men were to overhear this conversation, Emilia’s behavior would be viewed as proof of the validity of their assertions and society’s beliefs about female silence being directly correlated to female chastity. Her promotion of adultery here coincides later with her speech when she becomes Iago’s undoing. Boyce describes Emilia as, a “sharp-tongued woman” who “rails against men and marriage” (177). When Emilia is later killed by her husband for being loose with her words and thus revealing his plot, the implications of Boyce’s description become hauntingly clear.

While in *The Tragedy of Mariam* it would appear that the speaking patterns of the main characters are similar, Cary goes to great lengths to subvert the Renaissance assumptions of women and speech. While the Chorus seems to be confirming these beliefs, its role is that of a representative of the general population's thought in Renaissance England rather than a set of assumptions that the play seeks to perpetuate. In fact, the demands of the Chorus are one of the first things that Mariam subverts. The Chorus states that a wife should only speak to her husband, but as Raber points out it is the conversation with Herod that "ultimately leads to Mariam's execution" ("Gender" 325). This point references the scene in which Mariam expresses her anger for Herod because he murdered her brother and grandfather in addition to her discovery that upon his own death Herod ordered that she be killed as well. Because of her outspokenness, Herod assumes that she has been unchaste. Kim Walker, author of *Women Writers of the English Renaissance* illustrates this point in saying, "Her anger leads to her outspoken rejection of Herod's love and bed, which prompts him to assume sexual transgression on her part, for which he has her beheaded" (133). In Herod's eyes it is apparently absurd that Mariam should speak on behalf of her own emotions, especially since he has already explained the death of her relatives. It is her defense of herself that ignites his belief that she has been unchaste.

Mariam fell victim to the illogical belief that female silence is linked to female chastity, which is, ironically, why she speaks for herself in the first place, and this ultimately leads to her death. She is a victim in believing that because she has been chaste she has nothing to fear. She fails to connect her speech to her chastity and this becomes her undoing. She reflects upon this new understanding in her final soliloquy:

Had I but with humility been graced  
 As well as fair, I might have proved me wise;  
 But I did think because I knew me chaste,  
 One virtue for a woman might suffice" (4.8.35-38).

Mariam hints at the impossibility of fulfilling the woman's role when she says "one virtue for a woman might suffice" because this signifies that women must be perceived from all perspectives as being virtuous (Purkiss xix). She also hints at the unnatural marriage of female silence with chastity; in this way Cary strives to divorce this relationship.

In another effort to accomplish this, Cary created Salome. Salome is actually Iago's equal but because she is still speaking from the position of other, which was assumed to be a natural position for women at the time, it will serve best to compare her speech to that of Emilia's. Whereas Emilia's prescribed excessive speech coincides with her views of adultery thus fueling the Renaissance assumptions about the relationship of speech and chastity, Salome inverts this idea by exposing and manipulating the patriarchal system of Renaissance England. Interestingly, Salome is also given soliloquies through which we gain more insight into her motives. In her soliloquy that constitutes the whole of Act I scene IV, Salome openly questions the reasoning behind the laws regarding divorce:

Why should such privilege to man be given?  
 Or given to them, why barred from women then?  
 Are men than we in greater grace with Heaven?  
 Or cannot women hate as well as men?" (45-48)

This speech resonates with that of Emilia when she claims that women should be able to have affairs just like men, “Let husbands know / Their wives have sense like them” (4.3.89-90). The only difference between the two is that Salome recognizes the role of speech in her society and uses it to her advantage. This point is further illustrated by Karen Raber in saying, “Salome’s speech confutes theories based on “natural” order or natural categories, pointing out that all relationships are constructed and thus manipulable by the individual” (“Gender” 330). Because Salome knows how to effectively use language to meet her ends, she ultimately convinces Herod to go through with the murder of Mariam by reminding him that Mariam has betrayed him:

*Salome:* She speaks a beauteous language, but within

Her heart is false as powder, and her tongue

Doth but allure the auditors to sin,

And is the instrument to do you wrong.

*Herod:* It may be so: nay, ‘tis so: she’s unchaste,

Her mouth will ope to ev’ry stranger’s ear;

Then let the executioner make haste,

Lest she enchant him, if her words he hear.

(4.7.75-82)

Salome does not speak to excess; she smartly adds thoughts that lead Herod towards his ultimate decision just as Iago dropped hints that ultimately influenced Othello’s decision. At one point Herod demands that Mariam be spared and Salome responds using the wavering thought typical of women’s speech during the Renaissance, “Then you’ll no more remember what hath past / Sohemus’ love, and hers shall be forgot / ‘Tis well in

truth, that fault may be her last / And she may mend, though yet she love you not” (4.7.115-118). Herod is too engrossed in the thought of his wife being known by Sohemus to see Salome for who she is, a woman that has twice deceived him resulting in the execution of both of her ex-husbands. In the end, Salome manipulates speech and the patriarchal ideology of the Renaissance to get everything she wants: a new lover and a dead Mariam.

In this way, Cary tries to dissociate the ideas of speech and chastity as part of her subversion of the genre of tragedy. According to Walker, the ultimate effect this subversion of speech has is to “render no single voice authoritative” (139). Interestingly, though, the only major female character alive at the end of both plays is Salome. She is the only one to end up victorious--even Iago is ultimately betrayed and punished--because she understood the intricacies and loopholes of the “gender system” of Renaissance England. It would appear to me, then, that the only female authoritative voice left to listen to is the one that tells us how to manipulate the restrictions imposed upon us: Salome’s. Many critics do not understand what Cary’s stance is on the position of women. While it is true that Cary does not come right out and say this, it is important to consider what would have happened if she had thought and expressed her opinions if they were contrary to society’s beliefs. Whether or not Salome was kept alive as a symbol of Cary’s stance on women, it has to be noted that Cary went to great lengths to subvert a traditional male-dominated genre in order to deliver a piece of writing that would accurately reflect her life. Perhaps the unclear stance after her deconstruction of a tradition is a natural period of readjustment, similar to the time after a king is overthrown.

In any case, the most important stance Cary takes is giving women an identity and a voice: an act that in itself was revolutionary for her time.

### Works Cited

- Auden, W.H. *Lectures on Shakespeare*. The Estate of W.H. Auden, 2000. Introduction and notes Arthur Kirsch. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002.
- Bloom, Harold. *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*. New York: Riverhead Books, 1998.
- Boyce, Charles. *Shakespeare A to Z*. New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, 1990.
- Callaghan, Dymrna. *Women and Gender in Renaissance Tragedy*. New Jersey: Humanities Press International, 1989.
- Cary, Elizabeth. "The Tragedy of Mariam, The Fair Queen of Jewry." *The Longman Anthology of British Literature*. Vol.1. Ed. David Damrosch. New York: Addison-Wesley Longman, 1999. 1277-1328.
- Gruber, Elizabeth. "Insurgent Flesh: Epistemology and Violence in Othello and The Tragedy of Miriam." *Women's Studies* 32.4 (2003): 393-411.
- Jordan, Constance and Clare Carroll. Introduction. "Elizabeth Cary." *The Longman Anthology of British Literature*. Vol. 1. Ed. David Damrosch. New York: Addison-Wesley Longman, 1999. 1275-1277.
- Kelly, Erna. "Re: Topic Choice." E-mail to Lindsey Brandrup. 22 Feb. 2005.
- . "Characteristics of Shakespearean Tragedies." University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. Eau Claire, WI. 17 Nov. 2002.
- Kemp, Theresa D. "The Family is a Little Commonwealth: Teaching Mariam and Othello in a Special-Topics Course on Domestic England." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 47.4 (1996): 451-460.

- Logan, Sandra. "Domestic disturbance and the disordered state in Shakespeare's *Othello*." *Textual Practice* 18.3 (2004): 351-375.
- Purkiss, Diane, ed. *Renaissance Women: The Plays of Elizabeth Cary, The Poems of Aemilia Lanyer*. London: William Pickering, 1994.
- Raber, Karen L. "Gender and the Political Subject in The Tragedy of Miriam." *Studies in English Literature* 35.2 (1995): 321-344.
- . *Dramatic Difference: Gender, Class, and Genre in the Early Modern Closet Drama*. London: Associated University Press, 2001.
- Shakespeare, William. "Othello." *The Longman Anthology of British Literature*. Vol.1. Ed. David Damrosch New York: Addison-Wesley Longman, 1999. 1180-1260.
- Walker, Kim. *Women Writers of the English Renaissance*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996.