



Feminine Grotesque in *The Tragedy of Mariam* by Elizabeth Cary

Hayat Tawfiq Bedaiwi*

Assistant Professor- King Saud University

hayatbedaiwi@gmail.com

Abstract:

The Tragedy of Mariam (1613) by Elizabeth Cary is a play that depicts a very turn of gender roles and plot as a result of the “grotesque”. Cary shows Mariam as the character that flips the roles of the play and plot. Cary gives Mariam a public voice, exposing this trait as something demonic, and as an aspect that audiences in the Jacobean era are not used to seeing. In this paper I argue that Mariam and Salome in particular are performing the role of a grotesque wives. This performance creates the topsy-turvy world of carnivalesque misrule, making Mariam stand out as an outcast in a society that is used to obedient women and women that do not have public voices.

Received: 13/03/2024

Accepted: 01/04/2023

Available online: 30/06/2024

In *The Tragedy of Mariam*¹ Elizabeth Cary represents women as “grotesque”. Mariam grotesqueness is evident in her role as a bad Renaissance women/wife. Her actions in the play are unexpected and out of the usual. I think that the grotesque is very significant when it happens in a carnivalesque atmosphere. The plot itself greatly represents this substance of carnival. In the very opening pages of *Mariam*² we are represented with the absence of Herod, Mariam’s husband, who is actually an authority figure in the play. His absence causes an imbalance that affects the whole play even after he returns. At first, Mariam seems happy that Herod, her tyrannical husband, is thought dead but the play begins in a time of mourning and there is no festival occurring.

I think it’s important to define the two terms of carnival and grotesque and call attention to how my reading of *Mariam* uses these two terms. Michael Bristol defines Carnival as a festive time where roles are turned for a short period of time to celebrate different feasts of the year like Misrule, May Day and harvest festivals (Bristol 641). Haroham defines “... the grotesque [as] a structure. The structure of estrangement, suddenness and surprise, [as Wolfgang Kaser] asserts, are essential elements in this estrangement; the familiar and commonplace must be suddenly subverted or undermined by the uncanny or alien ... [and that] it is our world which ceases to be reliable, and we feel that we would be unable to live in this changed world. The grotesque entails fear of life, rather than fear of death” (Harpham 462). What makes the play seem like a carnival is the fact that everyone in this play is performing a role and Mariam and Salome in particular are performing the role of a grotesque wives. This performance creates the topsy-turvy world of carnivalesque misrule. In writing *Mariam*, Cary turns the tables back on the image of a good wife that circulated in historical pamphlets such as “The Arraignment of Lewd, Idle, Forward, and Inconstant Women”, “Hic Mulier; or, The Man-Woman; Haec Vir; or the Womanish Man” and “Amelia Lanyer’s 1570-1640, From Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum (Eve’s apology). In my paper, I argue that Mariam’s grotesque nature comes from the fact of her having a public voice in the play, which is socially unacceptable during the Renaissance. This means that her voice can reach the ear of someone other than her husband, and in public, and it implies that Mariam might be willing to become more carnal with someone other than her husband. Harpham states that the grotesque as a theme serves as a thematic metaphor for confusion, chaos and loss of perspective (Harpham 466). As a character, Mariam is confused and doesn’t know how she is supposed to act in the time of mourning because she has mixed feelings of both joy and hatred. Harpham argues that in order for an event to be labeled as grotesque, the rules of order have to collapse (Harpham 466). In *Mariam*, Herod is absent at the beginning of the play. Harpham states that the grotesque tends to subvert characters’ human virtue, dignity and performativity (Harpham 467). This is actually what happens with Salome, Mariam and Alexandra. All three traits are lost to Mariam while Salome and

Alexandra preserve their human virtue, dignity and performativity, at least in the public but not the private sphere. In that sense Mariam is demonized. As a reward of her grotesqueness Salome preserves her life in the play. Salome's survival is grotesque in itself because she survives and she is not "virtuous". Furthermore, Mariam's mother, Alexandra, turns on Mariam and blames her for Herod's discomfort as Herod decides to sentence Mariam to death. She is presented as a grotesque mother.

Unlike the familiar subversion & containment theories that define Carnival as "a controlled release of subversive desires because it only temporarily inverts norms and the elements, which becomes exceptional and abnormal [...]"(Yaneva 46), I argue that the carnival continues to happen in *Mariam* and the roles cannot be reversed to their normal place. I think that by presenting these women characters as grotesque and in a carnival atmosphere, Cary is being critical of the imprisonment of women in their patriarchal society, which represents them as demons who lack wifely manners. She is also very critical of the pamphlets that were published at the same time of the play, indirectly through her construction of these characters, such as "The Arraignment of Lewd, Idle, Forward, and Inconstant Women", "Hic Mulier; or, The Man-Woman; Haec Vir; or the Womanish Man" and "Amelia Lanyer's 1570-1640, From Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum (Eve's apology).

Chris Humphrey suggests that scholars need to think beyond the binary of "subversion or containment" to locate carnival's significance within the context of a specific time and place³. Containment theories show that "Carnival becomes a means through which political control over the majority is cunningly exercised. In that sense Carnival is a controlled release of subversive desires because it only temporarily inverts norms and the elements, which becomes exceptional and abnormal is being reintegrated after a brief glimpse into a world of extraordinary vision" (Yaneva 46). This approach "insists on the assumption that carnivalesque rituals are only venting anxieties and frustrations of group and, although it permits them to indulge in the breaking of rule and gives them the opportunity to exercise power in a comic way, it is perpetuated in complicity with the official order, played in the supposed subversion of it as conservative form of social control." (Yaneva 46). Yaneva argues that such approaches to carnival "reaffirms authority by offering reassurance about its ability to contain disorder and resolve it in a final image of unity [...]" (Yaneva 46). I think that the carnival never ends in *Mariam* since Salome get what she desires and Mariam is left to face her tragedy alone. In my opinion, without the aspect of containment we cannot see any agency for these female characters. Mariam is acting against authority and Salome is acting with authority. In my paper I'd like to discuss how Mariam and Salome are represented as grotesque figures in a never-ending carnival setting, and how the atmosphere of the whole play resembles that of a carnival, which allows for

misrule and chaos in the play.

The play is well received by many critics and many critics have joined the growing academic conversation about the play. I think that there are three trends of criticism concerning *Mariam*. *Mariam* has been studied and analyzed by many critics and their efforts are exhaustive. The first wave of critics look at the play as a closet drama and at the sex of its author and how these two aspects are significant in helping critics to come up with a plausible reading of *Mariam*. Susan B. Iwanisziw claims that the play is a closet drama and it converses with the didactic historical pamphlets that happened to appear at the same time as the play. Lyn Bennett, as well as other critics, argues that, “Elizabeth Cary was the first English woman to compose and publish in an original five-act” (5). Laurie J. Shanon observed that “the body of *Mariam* criticism “emphasizes almost exclusively a reading of the drama that centers upon the character of Mariam, its conflicts, heroism, and ultimate triumph or transcendence” (350).⁴ Meranda Nesler argues that Cary “reveals that the closet drama form and its proximity to conduct literature didacticism provided a socially protected space for women’s public authorship and acting.” (364)

Most critics of *Mariam* focused on very minor detail in the play. Biographical criticism⁵ has been almost overwhelming. Some other critics like Elaine Beilin attributes *The Tragedy of Mariam* to the playwright’s life as a woman and as a wife in early seventeenth century⁶(45). Beilin emphasizes that *Mariam* is a psychomachia, “one that Lady Cary resolved by extending the limits of her personal conflict” (53). Alexandra G. Bennett states that “the fact that one of the most popular scholarly editions of the text republishes the play in combination with Cary’s extant biography, *The Lady Falkland Her Life*, simultaneously underscores and encourages this approach (293). Shanon believes that “some readings of the play view it as wish-fulfillment or self justification on Cary’s part; others construe it as almost exclusively a play about individual character, disregarding signals of the generic conventions of Senecan closet drama.” (354). Some other critics focus on the sex of the writer and ignore the text and how *Mariam* contributes to the ongoing debates of women (Shanon 354).

The second wave of critics are contemporary feminine critics who look the “emergence of women writers and revisionist history has involved the use of such liberal categories as individualist self authoring, self expression, transformational engagement, empowerment, and ideas of the subjectivity and voice” (Shanon 354). So most critical approaches situate *Mariam* as part of a larger narrative about the development of “authorial individualism” for women (Shanon 354)⁷. Other minor studies focus on gender roles examining *Mariam* as a scapegoat; figure of Christ (Beilin 60)⁸. Maureen Quilligan examines the interconnections of subjectivity, gender and class to form a firmer historical ground for understanding the part pure power plays in gender determinations; “seen from the

perspective of Cary's female-authored tragedy, the shared verbal play and sheer slipperiness of language in communication between husband and wife is less *jouissance* than the old game of dominance" (528).

Salome has always been compared and contrasted with Mariam as a character by critics but Lyn Bennett has decided to provide a redemptive reading of Salome. Bennett thinks that these "very different characters equally represent polarized constructions of women that prevailed in early modern culture—that is, the type of Mary and the type of Eve." (6) Bennett claims that Mariam and Salome can be read as "Cary's critical commentary on contemporary constructions of women and, more importantly, as this playwright's probing engagement with the kind of scriptural exegesis (analysis of texts) that was so much invoked to define such types." (6) As a type of Eve Salome is redeemable and here Cary uses both these characters "to complicate prevailing ideas about women: ultimately, Mariam does not affirm these characters' professed opposition but uses both women to question received truths about the nature of women"⁹ (6).

The third wave of critics tend to focus on recent critical perspectives and interpretations that have to do with Mariam's silence and speech. Miller examines the domestic politics in *Mariam* and women ties within the household particularly maternal conflicts and bonds that provide "alternative speaking positions for women" (354). Elisa Oh argues that Mariam's verbal absence "introduces an alternate, plausible explanation for a "natural" social order their resistant yet traditionally virtuous silence demonstrate that women can exercise sound, independent moral judgment ..." (187). Reina Green claims that *Mariam* offers "two images of a woman whispering into the ear of a politically powerful male figure, but in both cases such domestic council ends in disruption and tragedy and that her tragedy proves that "cultural uncertainty about women's domestic place is the symptom of a larger socio-cultural disease" one that threatens the stability of the state (322). Kimberly Poltevin reports on critics who tend to talk about race in the play and make it exchangeable with gender and that the play shows that early modern women are makers and bearers of racial meaning (15). Karin Larber is interested in "the representation of the power dynamic between speakers and listeners in early modern drama and to explore the effect of gender of this dynamic" (460). Nandra Perry looks at the Christian heroic in the play and what the "exemplary Christian looks like in a religiously divided culture" (108). Shari Zimmerman argues that "Milton's polemical treatment of marriage, divorce, and women's fir conjugal role may be read usefully in light of this earlier seventeenth-century female writer" (555). Alison Shell discusses how Cary used the historical source creatively to discuss the themes in her paly (55).

I think that It's also necessary to establish the academic conversation surrounding the two terms, grotesque and carnival . The grotesque as a topic in Renaissance Drama has been addressed and given some critical attention, but I think that this academic conversation is very limited and still growing, that is why I aim at enriching this conversation by adding my own analysis of women in *Mariam* as grotesque. The grotesque and carnival have been well defined and anchored by acclaimed scholars in the field. Geoffrey Harpham attempts to define the grotesque and its characteristics and origins in "The Grotesque: First Principals". Michael Bristol in "Carnival and the Institution of Theater in Elizabethan England" examines the notion of carnival and how it was perceived by audiences of Elizabethan England. The idea of carnival in Elizabethan and Renaissance England started with thinking of the theatre as a professional form of carnival; "As the great Russian scholar Mikhail Bakhtin has noted, the origins and development of carnival are one of the most complex and most interesting problems in the history of culture, and scholarly interest in the subject has continued to grow during the 1980s and the 1990s." (Humphrey viii). Michael Bristol in his article "Carnival and The Institution of Theatre in Elizabethan England" argues that the Elizabethan theatre is an "institutionalized and professionalized form of Carnival and of popular festive activity in general" and that "Theatre and Carnival are neighboring institutions with similar logics of representation and similar orientation to social reality as a whole" (637). I understand that *Mariam* is a closet Drama, which is supposed to be only read and not performed. I think that it might be difficult to see how the carnival plays out in this play. In my opinion, it is the act of writing the play that can be looked at in the light of carnival because it writing the play Cary is criticizing society and traditions that further imprison women during that era. My reading of this aspect of the play as a closet drama is echoed in the representation of carnival by Bristol as an active and cultural social progress in Renaissance society (Bristol 640). Cary is being an active writer by choosing to use a carnival lens for the play. I think that carnival is an important part of Elizabethan England because "... the carnival is being seen as more than just a seasonal entertainment or celebration –it is seen as the voice of an oppressed majority, or as means through which political control over that majority is cunningly exercised." (Humphrey 2) *Mariam* and *Salome* could symbolize this oppressed majority as characters in the play. *Mariam* is performing against patriarchal authority and *Salome* is performing with this authority, which means that she is playing her part right unlike *Mariam* who is confused about how she is supposed to perform. I totally agree that the real tragedy of *Mariam* is "the misogyny that it so often enabled and sustained by willful readings of Scripture (Lyn Bennett 18). Herod's negative view of women is what "precipitates the play's tragic climax" (Lynn Bennett 19).

In my opinion, when we examine carnival, we also have to examine grotesqueness. I think that the two terms go hand in hand with each other. Harpham states that “[...] the grotesque [can be incooperated] into non grotesque structures ...by the use of certain themes which almost inherently involve the grotesque. Some of these are predominantly literary, such as the masked ball, the carnival, and the double” (Harpham 466). In an attempt to define the grotesque Harpham states that “...the grotesque is a structure. The structure of estrangement, suddenness and surprise, [as Wolfgang Kaser] asserts, are essential elements in this estrangement; the familiar and commonplace must be suddenly subverted or undermined by the uncanny or alien ... it is our world which ceases to be reliable, and we feel that we would be unable to live in this changed world. The grotesque entails fear of life, rather than fear of death” (Harpham 462). Kafka argues that the grotesque may be latent in “an idea or a situation as well as in a physical condition” (Harpham 462). For anything to be grotesque, it must arouse three responses: laughter and astonishment and disgust or horror (Harpham 463)¹⁰. Mariam and Salome certainly disgust and astonish the readers of the play. The idea of having a public voice might have been disturbing to readers in the Renaissance because that is not how they were raised to think of women. If anything, they were taught to respect the scripture and traditional roles of a silent and obedient wife in the household.

Studies that attempt to apply grotesqueness to Renaissance dramas are very limited. Celia R. Daileader argues for a masculine grotesque in Thomas Middleton’s *The Puritan Widow* (1606) and *Hamlet* (1600).¹¹ *Some Monster in Thy Thought/ Too Hideous To Be Shown: The Evolution of the Grotesque in Shakespearean Drama* (2003) by Eduardo Bernardo Pascual and *The Grotesque in The English Renaissance* (1975) are two dissertations that discuss the topic of the grotesque in the English Renaissance. Guy Corine claims in “Dekker and Middleton’s Carnivalized societies and The Sexually Grotesque in *The Honest Whore*, Part 1 and 2, and *Women Beware Women*”¹² that “any woman, even a literary character, “acting outside” of her socially prescribed role behaves grotesquely even monstrously” (129).

I mentioned earlier that Cary is actually being actively critical of the society and customs that imprison women. The major aim of many writers like Cary in the sixteenth and seventeenth century is to treat the question of “obedience to authority” and specifically the “obedience” of a wife to the authority of her husband (Beilin 46). A wife’s obedience was spoken of as a sacred obedience and was compared to that of the church and the monarch.¹³ Beilin suggests that Cary wrote *Mariam*¹⁴ sometime during the first decade of her marriage and she had all kinds of demanding authorities that of her husbands, mother in law and the protestant church (47). It is this kind of authority that Mariam and

Salome challenge, the patriarchal authority in the play and by doing so they are both considered grotesque characters.

In my opinion, I think that it is evident that *Mariam* seems to be in conversation with conduct books and sermons that appeared at that time that either speak for women in marriage or warn against them; “Early Modern Conduct books and sermons frequently acknowledge women as men’s spiritual equals, though, in practical terms, women’s ability to act from conscience was severely circumscribed by social and economic dependence” (Susan B. Iwanisziw 513-109). Katherine Usher Henderson and Barbara F. McManus in *Half Humankind: Contexts and Texts of the controversy about Women in England 1540-1640* state that the “debate over women’s worth has proved a staple of the Western literary diet, and during the Renaissance the English middle class had a distinct taste for this fare. Printers catered to this taste with pamphlet after pamphlet, some running into several editions.”¹⁵(3)

The most obvious theme discussed in these pamphlets is the theme of marriage. Marriage is a great theme in this play. The pamphlets show that marriage for these women is the only way to be respected; “In the English Renaissance the assumption that a woman would marry was so universal that it was seldom explicitly articulated. A document which does express this assumption is *The Law’s Resolution of Women’s Rights* (1632); its anonymous author wrote of women, “All of them are understood either married or to be married; the Common Law here Shaketh hand with divinity.” (Henderson and MacManus 72). Barbara Hanawalt states that “Marriage was both a contractual agreement and an emotional investment. For women it was a defining moment in their lives [in the middle ages].” (69) Pamphlets are to be read and circulated as a way to keep women on tack in their marriages.

The two pamphlets I examine are “The Arraignment of Lewd, Idle, Forward, and Inconstant Women” and “Hic Mulier; or, The Man-Woman; Haec Vir; or the Womanish Man”. The major idea behind Hic Mulier and Haec Vir is to attack “the masculine style of dress as unnatural and blasphemous, an outward sign of women’s attempt to usurp masculine aggressiveness, authority, and sexual freedom” (18). Haec Vir counteracts with the figure of the effeminate fop.” (18). Mariam is not wearing a man’s pants but she has the trait that concerns men only at that time and it’s the trait of a public voice. In “The Arraignment of Lewd, Idle, Forward, and Inconstant Women” women are differentiated against in a lengthy list of what women are like in nature.

Hic Mulier and Haec Vir is a pamphlet presented in the form of a “dialogue between the Man-Woman and the Womanish Man, “Haec Vir offers some eloquent arguments for freeing women from the bonds of custom before it capitulates to the Renaissance belief in the necessity of proper distinction between the sexes” (Henderson and McManus 18).¹⁶ In “Hic Mulier; or, The Man-Woman; Haec Vir;

or the Womanish Man” there is a strong opinion against the masculinization of women; “For since the days of Adam Women were never so Masculine: Masculine in their genders and whole generations, from the Mother to the youngest daughter [...]” (265). A woman without “redress” is described as most masculine and-most importantly- monstrous.” In the address to Masculine women are “stranger than strangeness itself” and that their bodies are not “half/beast Monster” but all Odious, all Devil” (266). This quote shows that the idea of women as grotesque exists in such literature and it did affect the writers such as Cary when it came to the writing of *Mariam*. Mariam as a character is grotesque because of public speech and this is definitely a masculine characteristic.

Two antifeminist writers in this anthology “repeat the old joke that a woman has but two faults: she neither does well nor says well”. The most popular three stereotypes in these pamphlets are of the Shrew, seductress, and vain woman (Henderson and McManus 50). Women are seen as grotesque in these pamphlets. This anthology describes women as lustful, deceitful, shrewish, domineering, extravagant, proud, vain, and selfish, so general are the attacks on women that at times one seems to be reading a mere catalogue of vices, an endlessly random list of faults.” (Henderson and McManus 47). For example *Hic Mulier* states “For the clearest River that is hath some dirt in the bottom; jewels are all precious, but yet they are not all of one price nor all of one virtue. Gold is not all one picture; no more are women all of one disposition. Women are all necessary evils and yet not all given to wickedness; and yet many so bad [...]” (191). This quote actually reveals the general perceptions of women. In another example, *Hic Mulier* mentions that “Moses describeth a women thus “At the first beginning,” saith he, “a woman was made to be a helper unto man” but her “mind was set upon mischief, for by her aspiring mind and wanton will she quickly procured man’s fall. And therefore ever since they are and have been a woe unto man and follow the line of their first leader¹⁷.” (194) These lines condemn women’s initial sin and make them the sole source for man’s fall. Some other disgraceful description of women is that Women’s hearts are “full of holes [...] for if love steal in at one hole is steppeth out at another,”(194) and “a forward woman will never be tamed.” (194). Nothing condemns women’s with grotesqueness more than this quote; “many women are in shape Angles but in qualities Devils, painted coffins with rotten bones.” (205). Saying the wrong things is simply a justification for beating; “A woman’s sharp tongue is the bane of many a man’s existence, and he is therefore justified in beating her [...]” (209). Herod not only beats Mariam but he sends her for execution just because of some doubt that her voice reached Schemus’s ear¹⁸.

In addition to all these negative traits, the Arraignment adds the distorted image of the widow to the lengthy list of bad characteristics of women. Swetnman thinks that “widows are so forward, so

waspish, and so stubborn that thou canst not wrest them from their wills” (241). Swetnam also states that they are “the sum of the seven deadly sins, the Fiends of Satan, and the gates of hell.” (216) Mariam starts the play as a mourning widow who instead of feeling sadness for her husband’s alleged death, feels confused and can’t get herself to perform correctly as mourning widow.

In this part of the paper I will attempt to apply the carnival and grotesque to Mariam. For a start, I agree with Heller the plot is unbalanced because of two forces in the play. It is surprising that the missing Herod haunts “the first two acts as the other characters plot alliances built upon succession, revenge and marriage” and it seems that he is more “influential in his reported death than he would have been at home, for his absence motivated the plot of the play and sparks Mariam’s own fatal course of action.”(Heller 434) The kingdom that Herod wants for himself is actually a stolen kingdom. Salome upsets traditions and religious script by asking for a divorce simply because she is bored with her husband Constabarus. In the play there are two forces “opposing the predominating instability in Herod’s kingdom” (Shanon 363). One is “Moses’ law, lawfulness or custom, of which Constabarus is the main proponent. The Law provides for orderly succession: Herod has usurped the throne and embarked upon a series of political murders to keep it...Salome describes herself: “Ile be the custome-breaker” upsetting established procedure in her demand for divorce. “ (Shanon 363). The second force is the “Renaissance version of specifically male and harmonious and free friendship, chiefly exemplified by Constabarus’ relationship to the sons of Baba. This model offers itself as the highest form of human conduct, for there is no system if accounts, requitals, or compensation motivating it.” Constabarus hides the sons of Baba while risking his own life (Shanon 364). Constabarus warns against the coming disorder when Salome asks for her divorce. Salome causes a great imbalance in the play. Beilin argues that:

The seizure of male prerogative by this woman, accompanied by so cynical a view of law, sends a tremor into the proper order of things, for Lady Cary does not wish such female rebellion to go unanswered. Imagining the ancient world in terms of traditional medieval and renaissance order, the dramatist has Constabarus articulate the orthodox response to impending disorder “Are Hebrew women now transformed men? Why do you not as well our battles fight, and wear our armor?” (Beilin 56). Constabarus even tells Salome that she is “revers[ing] all order (Act 1, Scene 6, Line 84). Suffer this, and then/ Let all the world be topsy-turved quite!” (Act 1, Scene 6, Line 47-50). I think that Constabarus is the voice of reason in this play and he sees all the chaos Salome is causing especially by asking for a divorce, which was not allowed in their religious scripture, as he states that “A virtuous woman crowns her husband’s head. “(Act 1, Scene 6, Line 22) and doesn’t ask for a divorce.

As mentioned earlier, Corinee Guy claims that “any woman, even a literary character, “acting

outside” of her socially prescribed role behaves grotesquely even monstrously” (129). Mariam actually starts the play by acknowledging the fact that she is actually a different woman because she has a “public voice”. Sohemus confirms that “Unbridled speech is Mariam’s worst disgrace,” (Act 3, Scene 3, line 65). The Chorus also state that “When to their husbands they themselves do bind/ Do they not wholly give themselves away?/ or give their body, not their mind,/ Reserving that, though best, for others’ prey?” (Chorus 3) emphasizing by this saying the grotesqueness of a wife giving someone other than her husband her mind. This is the first sign we get from the play that Mariam is different. Cary as a dramatists acknowledges the stereotypes about women in the pamphlets about wives and women’s sin when she has Mariam state “My sex pleads pardon; pardon then afford; Mistaken is with us, but too too common.” (Act 1, Scene 1, line 7-8). While Mariam is actually lamenting on her state and confused she is, feeling both joy and grief for Herod’s assumed death, because Herod was a tyrannical ruler who executed her brother Aristobulus and grandfather Hyracanus. We find Mariam a faithful wife as she is more concerned about performing a role of a wife calling Herod her “lord” which can also refer to Herod as a king. (Act 1, Scene 1, Line 68).

Alexandra, her mother, shows up and Mariam tells herself “But, tears, fly back, and hide you in your banks!/You must not be to Alexandra seen.” (Act 1, Scene 1, Line 75-76). Because of Herod’s death Alexandra is plotting to have Antony woo either herself or Mariam and so the path is clear for her to do whatever she likes in the kingdom; “Let us retire us, that we may resolve/ How now to deal in this reversed state/ Great are th’affairs that we must now revolve,/ And great affairs must be taken late.” (Act 1, Scene 2, Line 125-128). They have freedom to do as they like because of this carnivilistic situation. However, I think that Alexandra prefers to have roles contained, at least in public because there is no doubt that she still feels bitter about Herod and his inferior bloodline, and that is why she backlashes at Mariam before her execution; “As Mariam goes to her death, her mother follows along railing upon her daughter.

As a grotesque character, Mariam is given an honorable way to die, even in the memory of her own husband. When Herod asks the messenger “What answer did her princely daughter make?” he is informed that Mariam was silent: “She made no answer, but lookt the while, As if thereof she scarce did notice take, Yet smiled, a dutiful, thought scornful smile.” (Act Scene 8). Nuntio describes Mariam’s execution scene to Herod and he states that “Her look did seem to keep the world in awe,/ Yet mildly did her face this fortune bear.” (Act 5, Scene 1 lines 27-28). Before dying Mariam calls Herod her “lord” although she is seen as an unchaste and a rebel which makes her a grotesque character. It seems that Mariam died with honor and dignity calling Herod her “lord”. This image of a

grotesque women given the opportunity to go with dignity reminds us of the image of *Queen Elizabeth Armada Speech to the Troops at Tilbury, August 9 1588*. The Queen herself is a woman and she tries to remind the troops of this fact; “I know I have the body but of a weak and feable woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a king and of a king of England too [...]”. It is as though Mariam and Elizabeth are trying to change the grotesque image that readers and people in the Renaissance have created and supported in the pamphlets.

The carnival is not contained even after Herod comes back from Rome. This is exemplified in the scene where Herod returns from Rome and we find that Mariam still keeps up the role of mourning her husband’s death by meeting Herod wearing black, which is grotesque: “...suits her garment to her mind/ And there no cheerful color can [she] find.” (Act 4, Scene 3, Lines 5-6). The grotesqueness also applies here because it seems that Mariam cannot “disguise, nor never taught/ [Her] face a look dissenting from [her] thought.” (Act 4, Scene 3, Lines 59-60).

Mariam isn’t the only one that acknowledges she is different because she has a public voice. Salome accuses Mariam of “[speaking] 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 [Herod] wrong.” (Act 4, Scene 7 line 73-76). Herod puts Mariam to death for the simple fact that “She is unchaste” and that “her mouth will ope to every stranger’s ear,” (Act 4, Scene 7, Lines 77-78). Even in the eyes of Doris, Herod’s first wife, Mariam is an adulterer and a husband stealer; “I’heaven? Your beauty cannot bring you thither./ Your soul is black and spotted, full of sim; you in adult’ry lived nine year together,/ And heaven will never let adultery in.” (Act 4, Scene 8, lines 51-54).

Sometimes, one can’t help but feel some sympathy towards Salome’s grotesque character because “in her soliloquy Salome reveals the hopelessness of women in a world where they are repeatedly told that they are the evil cause of all human misery. She insists that there is no point in her even attempting to regain her lost honor” (Act 1 Scene 4 Line 281-84). I would also agree that “Instead of embodying an implicit potential for pretense, she is explicit in fabricating her personae, modifying her behavior to conform to whichever paradigm will get her what she wants.” (Alexandra G. Bennett 303). Being able to change colors so quickly as a lizard in the desert, Salome is not to be trusted as a woman.

Salome seeks to change her fate in this carnivalistic atmosphere. She wants to divorce Constabarus and marry Silleus. She states that “[...] Shame is gone, and honor wiped away,/ And Impudency on my forehead sits.” (Act 1, Scene 4, line 33-34). She, too, establishes her self as a different woman because of her boldness. She is presented as a grotesque character here because of her “custom breaking”; “I’ll be the custom-breaker: and begin to show my sex the way to freedom’s door,/

And whith an Off'ring will I purge my sins;/ The Law was made for none but who are poor" (Act 1, Scene 4, 49-52).

Salome acknowledges Sinfulness and her "hypocritical claim to speak for other aristocratic women while simultaneously denying Mariam the right to enjoy her separation from Herod" shows that she is selfish (Susan B. Iwanisziw 112-516). Salome is selfish because she claims to want to become a model for other women but all she cares about in reality is her own future. Constabarus condemns Salome's behaviors and morals and this establishes her as a grotesque character even more; "Oh, Salome, how much you wrong your name, your race, your country, and your husband most! A stranger's private conference is shame, I blush for you, that have your blushing lost." (Act 1 Scene 6, line 1-4). Even the simplest feminine trait of blushing is lost in Salome so she seems more like a masculine figure who doesn't blush.

I think that it's Graphina who is identified as the ideal women in the play and not the title character. In act II, Scene 1 Pheroras is contemplating his luck with Graphina. Pheroras, Herod's brother is in love with Graphina and he wants to marry her. Pheroras is actually relieved that Herod didn't come back, other wise he would have had to marry Herod's little girl, and he detest the idea. Through out his whole speech Graphina is actually silent and this makes Pheroras distressed and therefore Graphina only talks back when Pheroras asks her to do so. In that sense she is performing the role of a silent obedient woman.

In conclusion, I argue that the idea of the grotesque here may seem a little repulsive to readers in that era. I claimed in the beginning of my paper that *Mariam* takes place in a never-ending carnival setting. So once the subversion happens then there is no containment. For readers in Renaissance England this play might have been viewed as a play with grotesque deformed characters but I think that this shock of the grotesque will not last forever; "One cant be shocked forever; and to the Parisian who strolls by Notre Dame on his way to work, even the gargoyles must seem as comfortable as old slippers. Domesticating our grotesqueries, we pay, applaud, or admire them, and finally pay them the ultimate tribute of ignoring their deformity" (Harpham 463). Faced with all the pressures of tradition, religion, country, and patriarchy, and being described as grotesque characters in a carnival setting, Mariam and Salome's grotesqueness seems to fade away and looked at with normality because times have changed and asking for a divorce or speaking in public isn't a shameful grotesque thing anymore. Looking at grotesqueness for a different perspective, the fact that this behavior is looked at as a normal thing can also make readers feel repulsive and see how grotesque these characters are.

المستخلص

البشاعة الأنثوية في مأساة مريم (مسرحية بقلم إليزابيث كاري)

حياة توفيق بدوي

مأساة مريم | (1613) بقلم إليزابيث كاري هي مسرحية تصور تحولاً كبيراً في الأدوار والمؤامرة بين الجنسين نتيجة لـ "البشع". تظهر كاري مريم على أنها الشخصية التي تقلب أدوار المسرحية والحبكة. تمنح كاري مريم صوتاً عاماً، ويكشف عن هذه السمة كشيء شيطاني، وكجانب لم يعتاد الجمهور في العصر اليعقوبي على رؤيته. في هذه الورقة ناقش بان شخصيات مريم وسالومي في المسرحية على وجه الخصوص يؤديان دور الزوجات البشعات. يخلق هذا الأداء عالماً مقلوباً من سوء الحكم الكرنفالي، مما يجعل مريم تبرز كمنبوذة في مجتمع معتاد على النساء المطيعات والنساء اللاتي ليس لديهن أصوات عامة. في مأساة مريم، تمثل إليزابيث كاري النساء على أنهن "بشعات". تتجلى بشاعة مريم في دورها كامرأة/زوجة سيئة في عصر النهضة. تصرفاتها في المسرحية غير متوقعة وخارجة عن المؤلف.

References

¹ The source of Lady Cary's play is chapter 15 and 16 of Lodge's translation of Flavius Josephus' Jewish Antiquities (93 C.E) and History of the Jewish War (75-79 CE). In the source history Cary "collapses years of Josephus' account into the events of a day" (Beilin 53). In the original source, Herod the Great is appointed king of Judah by the Romans in 39 B.C.E., and he divorces his first wife, Doris, three years later to "strengthen a needed alliance with the Jews through his marriage to Mariam" (Bevington 615). Mariam is actually from the family he has displaced by executing Mariam's grandfather, Hyrcanus, on charge of treason, and then staged an accident where he drowned Mariam's brother Aristobulus. Alexandra complained to Marc Antony about these crimes and so Herod was obliged to travel to Rome to "give an account of himself" (Bevington 616). This is where Cary's play picks up. Herod is returning from his second visit to Rome, Salome has her first husband, Josephus, executed because he told Mariam the secret that she would be killed if Herod died. There is also an arranged marriage for Salome to Constaburus, governor of Idumaea and Gaza. He returns from Rome to find that his wife is upset about he murdered kin and Salome wants to destroy Mariam. Mariam is accused of being unfaithful and that she is conspiring to kill him (Bevington 616). Her Second source is the Bible. Lynn Bennett mentions that Cary read extensively in religious controversy and was familiar with the writings of Church fathers (10).

² I will be referring to the play as *Mariam* and the character of Mariam will not be italicized.

³ Stephan Greenbelt uses this theory of authority in his essay "invisible Bullets".

⁴ Alexandra G. Bennett mentions that some critics like Sandra K. Fischer and Catherine Belsey, and Patterson Hannay see Mariam as an overtly Feminist text and Margert W. Ferguson, Florence Howe and Louis Schleiner see it as an "explicit validation of aristocratic male dominance within marriage and the state." (293)

⁵ One of Elizabeth Cary's daughters wrote a biography of her mother and many critics and biographers of Cary use this biography. Laurie J. Shanon mentions two other biographies of Cary by Georgiana Fullerton, *Life of Elizabeth, Lady Falkland 1582-1639* (London, 1883) and Keneth Murdoch, *Sun at Noon: Three Biographical Sketches* (New York, 1939) (353).

⁶ Laurie J. Shanon argues that within the tragic framework, Cary uses "extended dramatic monologues, speeches, and choruses to develop themes of women's problematic anticipation in social systems of communication and exchange. Cary shows the connection between female chastity, silence, constancy, and privacy that opposes the linked themes of promiscuity, publicity of speech, and changeability" (352).

⁷ Shanon gives a very compressive list of the criticism of Mariam starting from 1924 until 1991. That criticism as Shanon mentions has to do with addressing *Mariam* in the context of genre and the story of Mariam/ Herod. (349)

⁸“Antonio describes Mariam’s death to Herod in a speech filled with analogies to the death of Christ, and at once we are guided to view Mariam as a type of Christ.” (Beilin 60)

⁹“Cary’s representation of Salome suggests that she was well aware of the genesis story’s inherent resistance to such definitive readings. Throughout the play Cary deploys a revisionist exegesis that, while certainly not exculpating of women that marks many early modern readings of Eve’s story.” (Lynn Bennet 9)

¹⁰“An unanticipated by-product of the Renaissance interest in Antiquity, the grotesque wormed its unwelcome way into the European consciousness near the end of the fifteenth century through a series of excavations unearthed morals dating from the Roman Decadence in which human and animal figures are intertwined with foliage in ways which violate not only the laws of statistics and gravity, but common sense and plain observation as well. Although the grotesque is now fully certified and licensed, it might seem highly improbable that that child is father to this man, so radically different from these morals are the forms we now call grotesque^{10b}” (Harpham 461).

¹¹ There are also two interesting dissertations that deal with the chorus and the woman’s questions debate. Please refer to Falk (1995) and Bosman (1995).

¹² Guy Corinee also has a dissertation that deals with both the carnival and grotesque entitled *The Female Grotesque Amid the Carnival in Renaissance Drama*.

¹³ Beilin mentions the *Homilies* “Of the State of Matrimony and in Basilikon Doron, James I instructed. “his son in the authority of a husband as in the authority of a king” (46) She even mentions Dr. William Gouge and William Whately who preached and after that published their advise on marriage which centered on the wife’s duty to obey, S. Paul is also quoted everywhere as “an authority for domestic arrangements: “Wives, submit yourself unto your husbands, as unto the Lord.” (47).

¹⁴ Here on *The Tragedy of Mariam* will be referred to as *Mariam*.

¹⁵ “A major pamphlet war broke out in 1615 with the publication of *The Arraignment of Lewd, Idle, Forward, and unconstant women*, published the pseudonym Thomass Tell-Troth but very quickly associated with Joseph Swetnam, who was possibly a fencing master.” (Henderson and McManus 16)

¹⁶ “The rousing popular controversies in Renaissance England about the nature of women differed from previous writing on the topic in several ways.” The rise of printing made possible the increase in the number of attacks and defenses and the middle class began reading these pamphlets, formal treatises on women “became less aristocratic and courtly”, and last with the “wider dissemination of attacks on women the proportion of defenses began to rise”. The pamphlet wars reveal all these trends. (Henderson and McManus 11). English women were defending their sex for the first time in print as well as publishing other nonreligious writings such as tracts on motherhood and translation of romances (Henderson and McManus 52).

¹⁷ Aemilia Lanyer’s in *Eve’s Appology* shows that it was because women are weak that Eve listened to the serpent and so it wasn’t her fault that Adam fell from heaven. However, in *Esther Hath hanged Haman* by Esther Sowernam states that “Although women sinned first, the sin was not completed until Adam fell; he alone was responsible for bringing sin to the rest of mankind”(224).

¹⁸ Swetnam’s *Arraignment* “initiated an anti feminist controversy” (Crandall 1)

Works Cited

Primary Sources:

- Anonymous. "Hic Mulier; or, The Man-Woman; Haec Vir; or the Womanish Man". *Half Humankind: Contexts and Texts of the Controversy about Women in England, 1540-1640*. Ed. Katherine U. Henderson, and Barbara F. McManus. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985. Print .
- Cary, Elizabeth. *The Tragedy of Mariam. English Renaissance Drama: A Norton Anthology*. Ed. David M. Bevington. New York: W.W. Norton, 2002. 615- 672. Print.
- Lanyer, Amelia. "Amelia Lanyer 1570-1640, From Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum". *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women*. Ed. Sandra M Gilbert and Susan Gubar. New York, W.W. Norton and Co, 1985. 35-38. Print.
- Swetnam, Joseph. "The Arraignment of Lewd, Idle, Forward, and Inconstant Women". *Half Humankind: Contexts and Texts of the Controversy about Women in England, 1540-1640*. Ed. Katherine U. Henderson, and Barbara F. McManus. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985. Print.

Secondary Sources:

- Beilin, Elaine. "Elizabeth Cary And The Tragedy Of Mariam." *Elizabeth Cary*. 3-22. Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2009. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 23 Oct. 2015.
- Bennett, Alexandra G. "Female Performativity ." *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 40.2 (2000): 293-309. Jstor. Web. 23 Oct. 2015.
- Bosman, Diane Rose. *The Tragedy of Mariam and The Women Question Debate* . McMaster University , 1995. Thesis.
- Bristol, Michael D. "Carnival and the Institutions of Theater in Elizabethan England". *ELH* 50.4 (1983): 637–654. Web.
- Crandall, Coryl. *Swetnam the Woman-Hater: The Controversy and the Play: A critical Edition with Introduction and Notes*. Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue University Studies, 1969. Print.
- Daileader, Celia R. "Thomas Middleton, William Shakespeare, And The Masculine Grotesque." *The Oxford Handbook of Thomas Middleton*. 452-468. Oxford, England: Oxford UP, 2012. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 16 Nov. 2015. Web. 16 Nov. 2015.
- Dolan, Frances E. 1960. "Home Rebels and House Traitors. *Dangerous Familiars: Representations of Domestic Crime in England, 1550-1700*. Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1994. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 23 Oct. 2015.
- Falk, Viona. *The Chorus in Elizabeth Cary's Tragedy of Mariam*. University of Manitoba, 1995. Thesis.
- Green, Reina. "Ears Prejudicate" in *Mariam and Duchess of Malfi. Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 43.2 (2003): 459–474. Jstor. Web. 23 Oct.2015.
- Guy, Corinee. "Dekker And Middleton's Carnivalized Societies And The Sexually Grotesque In The Honest Whore, Part 1 And 2 And Women Beware Women." *Mediterranean Studies* 19.(2010): 127-161. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 16 Nov. 2015.
- Guy, Corinee. "The Female Grotesque Amid the Carnival of Renaissance Drama." 3354588 University of Kansas, 2009. Ann Arbor: ProQuest. Web. 14 Nov. 2015.
- Hanawalt, Barbara. *The Wealth of Wives: Women, Law, and Economy in Late Medieval London*. Oxford; New York;: Oxford University Press, 2007. Print.
- Harpham, Geoffrey. "The Grotesque: First Principles". *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 34.4 (1976): 461–468.Jstor. Web. 16th November 2015.
- Heller, Jennifer L.. "Space, Violence, and Bodies in Middleton and Cary". *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 45.2 (2005): 425–441. *Academic Search Premier* .Web. 23 Oct. 2015.

- Hill, Barbara Ann. "The Grotesque In The English Renaissance." 7528360. University of Washington, 1975. Ann Arbor: ProQuest Diss. Web. 14 Nov. 2015.
- Iwanisziw, Susan B. "Conscience And The Disobedient Female Consort In The Closet Dramas Of John Milton And Elizabeth Cary." *Elizabeth Cary*. 513-526. Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2009. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 23 Oct. 2015.
- Miller, Naomi J. "Domestic Politics In Elizabeth Cary's The Tragedy Of Mariam." *Studies In English Literature (Rice)* 37.2 (1997): 353. *Academic Search Premier*. Web. 23 Oct. 2015.
- Nesler, Miranda Garno. "Closeted Authority in the Tragedy of Mariam." *SEL Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 52.2 (2012): 363-85. Web.
- Oh, Elisa. "Refusing To Speak: Silent, Chaste, And Disobedient Female Subjects In King Lear And The Tragedy Of Mariam." *Explorations In Renaissance Culture* 34.2 (2008): 185-216. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 23 Oct. 2015.
- Pascual, Eduardo Bernardo. "'Some Monster In Thy Thought/Too Hideous To Be Shown': The Evolution Of The Grotesque In Shakespearean Drama." *Dissertation Abstracts International, Section A: The Humanities And Social Sciences* 63.10 (2003): 3565. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 16 Nov. 2015.
- Perry, Nandra. "The Sound of Silence: Elizabeth Cary and the Christian Hero." *English Literary Renaissance* 38.1 (2008): 106-41. Web.
- Poitevin, Kimberly Woosley. "'Counterfeit Colour': 'Making up Race in Elizabeth Cary's The Tragedy of Meriam.'" *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 24.1 (2005): 13-34. Jstor. Web. 25 Oct. 2015.
- Quilligan, Maureen. "Staging Gender: William Shakespeare And Elizabeth Cary." *Elizabeth Cary*. 527-551. Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2009. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 23 Oct. 2015.
- Raber, Karen L. "Gender and Political Subject in the Tragedy of Mariam." *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 35.2 (1995): 321-343. Jstor. Web. 23 Oct. 2015.
- ,. 1961. *Dramatic Difference: Gender, Class, and Genre in the Early Modern Closet Drama*. Newark; London: University of Delaware Press, 2001. Print.
- Shannon, Laurie J. "The Tragedy Of Mariam: Cary's Critique Of The Terms Of Founding Social Discourses." *Elizabeth Cary*. 349-367. Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2009. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 23 Oct. 2015.
- Smith, Helen, 1977. *Grossly Material Things: Women and Book Production in Early Modern England*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2012. Print.
- Yaneva, Roazaliya. *Misrule and Reversals: Carnavalesque Performances in Christopher Marlow's Plays*. Munchen : Herbert Utz Verlag, 2013. Print.
- Zimmerman, Shari A. "Disaffection, Dissimulation, and the Uncertain Ground of Silent Dismission: Juxtaposing John Milton and Elizabeth Cary". *ELH* 66.3 (1999): 553-589. Jstor. Web. 25 Oct. 2015.