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# Critique of Phonocentrism in Elizabeth Cary's *The Tragedy of Mariam*

Elizabeth Cary'nin *The Tragedy of Mariam* Oyununda Sesmerkezcilik Eleştirisi

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**ABSTRACT**
According to Jacques Derrida, phonocentrism, the so-called supremacy of speech over writing, is in a close relationship with logocentrism, which is based upon male language. Phonocentric/logocentric worldview holds *agency* primarily as a matter of orality in that the spoken word is assumed to be offering a direct course to empowerment. Feminist theorists Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva aim to show the inhibitory impacts of logocentric language on women and suggest women should find *alternative* ways of expression to ward off its effects, which means women should invest in new models of communication where they can construct their political agency in line with their own material experiences. Such a struggle with patriarchal oppression of women's speech can be seen in the private life of Elizabeth Cary who was silenced by the patriarchy as a female playwright. Her closet drama *The Tragedy of Mariam* (1613) mirrors her theatrical quest for agency in which a silent female character achieves power in a patriarchal surrounding by means of a strategic employment of silence. Within this context, this article claims that Cary's closet drama can be an example of écriture féminine (feminine writing) for it showcases the political potentials of silence as a strategic model of expression where both the playwright and her silent female character acquire significant positions through the deconstruction of the speech/writing dichotomy.

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## Introduction

Western philosophy is based upon binaries like man/woman, human/animal, white/black, west/east and culture/nature etc. in which the first component is privileged over the second as it is thought to be the normal and ideal way of being. As Lois Tyson clarifies, according to Jacques Derrida, such oppositions are "little hierarchies" in which the first terms are considered superior. Therefore, by identifying which of the terms is privileged over the other, it is possible to find clues as to the ideology generated by the oppositions (2006, p. 254). One such hierarchy in western metaphysics is between speech and writing Derrida formulates as phonocentrism, by which he refers to the priority attributed to speech over writing in Western thinking since Plato.

In Derrida's view, the privileged status of speech pertains to the concept of "metaphysics of presence" which echoes Husserl's and some other philosophers', like Plato, Heidegger and Lévi-Strauss, supposition of "an immediately available area of certainty" (Sarup, 1993, pp. 35-36). According to such thinkers, speech is more "genuine" than writing since the presence of a speaker is believed to guarantee meaning (Morris, 1998, p. 117). Metaphysics asserts that whereas there

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is no voice in writing, in speech the mind has an immediate presence like a living object. Thus, for metaphysical philosophy, writing is "a lifeless instrument of recording, archiving or memorialization" (Wortham, 2010, p. 138) as opposed to the liveness and directness of speech.

Basing their arguments on the theories of Jacques Lacan, such feminist theorists as Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva suggest that in order to cope with the restricting influences of male-oriented perspectives on their thinking and lives, women should develop a language mode which differs from that of men. In *The Tragedy of Mariam*, Mariam's dare to resort to male-oriented language is one of the reasons for her condemnation by her society, and what Cary indicates is that unless women defy such language, it is not possible for them to overthrow patriarchal oppression at all. Indeed, Elizabeth Cary's preference for writing a closet drama reflects a similar concern since it was the only genre which allowed her voice to be heard among a number of leading male playwrights in her period. The genre she chose was not intended to be performed publicly but read individually as it was thought to be more acceptable for women. This study contends that Cary's forced preference for the silent closet drama can be regarded as an early experience of écriture féminine since it on the one hand reflects the oppressive material conditions that Cary herself had to endure and on the other hand addresses the political potentials around the ontological dynamics of silence by which both Cary and her silent female character can achieve power by means of a strategic employment of silence in a patriarchal surrounding.

*The Tragedy of Mariam* has been studied from various feminist perspectives so far. For instance, Bennett (2001) focuses on Salome as a representation of Eve, and Poitevin (2005) discusses the play's display of the issue of race and colour for female characters. Alfar (2008) examines the oppression of Mariam, Salome and Doris by the marriage law and their disregard of it, and Mackay (2014) points to how the conduct literature functioned to shape mother/daughter relations in the period. Whereas many analyses focus primarily on Mariam, some (Goldberg, 1997; Ferguson, 2003; Nesler, 2012) more specifically examine Graphina, who appears only in one brief scene. Likewise, my focus is on Graphina and how she challenges phonocentrism. Although some previous studies touched upon the play's display of phonocentrism, (Ferguson, 2003, p. 284; Hamamra, 2018, p. 86), this study takes critique of phonocentrism as its central point of analysis and focuses upon the convergence between phonocentrism and écriture féminine as represented in the play. While the tension around the attempts to achieve power through language has been the subject of critical debate in the existing scholarship on the play, this paper specifically focuses on how the intersection between écriture féminine and the critique of phonocentrism as embodied within the ontology of silence can offer an analytical space for the exploration of the notions of agency, power, and subjectivity. In this context, this study aims to contribute to the field by highlighting the importance of the play as an early instance of écriture féminine where both the playwright and the character of Graphina invest in the construction of an alternative communicative model that enables them to find and facilitate political potentials in even the most pervasive absence of speech.

## Derridean Critique of Presence and Speech

While Saussure regards the sign as a "unity," in Derrida's thinking, there is not a direct relation between the signifier and the signified since they are constantly making up new combinations, which points to lack of clear boundaries between them. As signifiers constantly turn into signifieds and signifieds steadily transform into signifiers, it is not possible to reach a final signified that is not also a signifier (Sarup, 1993, p. 33). Therefore, language consists only of chains of signifiers, not of a union of signifiers and signifieds. It merely refers to the play of signifiers which itself is composed of and meaning is simply the "mental trace" this play of signifiers leaves behind (Tyson, 2006, pp. 252-253).

Derrida within this frame of thinking developed "deconstruction," a style of reading texts by focusing on their inconsistencies to question them from within. As Sarup points out, through deconstruction, the standards and the definitions which a text aims to foreground are used against it to reveal its own failure (1993, pp. 34-35). Deconstruction attempts to lay bare the working mechanisms of what Derrida conceptualizes as "metaphysics of presence", a reference to Western philosophy's perception of truth as 'presence' existing outside language. While metaphysics is associated with traditional forms of thinking and accepted social norms and aims to assert authority with the concept of "truth" at its center, deconstruction is essentially political and oppositional since it aims to question such traditional norms as the inferiority of women in patriarchal circles, intending to challenge the sources of social authority and hierarchy (Ryan, 2017, p. 87). In this sense, from a deconstructionist perspective, writing is a challenge to the whole concept of "structure" (Eagleton, 1996, p. 116) and Derrida's intention to interrogate the authority of speech is a challenge to whole metaphysical thinking.

The priority attributed to speech in Western philosophy, as Derrida puts forth, is directly linked with the supposition of "presence". Since Western philosophy contends speech conveys meaning directly and imminently, it is assumed to be closer to "presence" (Sarup, 1993, pp. 35-36). Conventionally, voice (Greek *phono*) is thought to be "the locus of truth" "and the presence of consciousness to itself" (Bunnin and Yu, 2004, p. 528); while one is searching for truth, for example, one hears the 'voice' of reason (p. 528). Therefore, speech is thought to be the sign of presence and truth. However, as Terry Eagleton explicates, Derridean philosophy argues that Western philosophers fail to see that voice is material like print. As spoken signs work through a process of difference[1] like written signs, speaking is a kind of writing as writing is a kind of speaking (1996, p. 113). For Derrida, speech is based on a prior writing, that is, on *difference* which generates meaning; therefore, the presence and privilege of speech is a mere illusion (Baldick, 2008, p. 257). This is to claim that the status attributed to the acoustic aspect of language over the graphic extent is one that is devoid of an inherent value because, first, this is a value-ridden perspective that seeks to follow socially-constructed hierarchies, and second, the fact that it is only the acoustic differences that constitute meaning in language is problematic on the ground that the written, or *grammatological*, aspect of language is no less capable of capturing meaning than speech. The phonocentric emphasis on the human capacity for "authentic self-expression" is, therefore, linked with social relations that uphold oral communication rather than textual means.

The critique of the priority of speech over textuality constitutes an important aspect of Derridean deconstruction, especially in its critical relation to logocentric "power" and "meaning." According to Derrida, phonocentrism and logocentrism are closely related as he emphasizes in *Of Grammatology*, "the heritage of that logocentrism […] is also a phonocentrism: absolute proximity of voice and being, of voice and the meaning of being, of voice and the ideality of meaning" (1997a, pp. 11-12). As he underlines, in Western phonocentric thinking, voice, being and meaning all incorporate each other. Logocentrism, the basis of all our conceptions, as Ryan remarks, can also be defined as the metaphysical suppositions that solidify hierarchical and authoritarian structures in the society (2017, p. 87). In logocentrism, there seems to be a desire for a "transcendental signifier" to relate to a fixed "transcendental signified". For example, God and Matter are such signs (logos) since they function as the foundation of a system of thought at the center of other signs. For Derrida, "[t]he function of this center [is] not only to orient, balance, and organize the structure […] but above all to make sure that the organizing principles of the structure would limit what we might call the *freeplay* of the structure" (Derrida, 1997b, p. 115), which implies the center does not

[1] Derrida coined the term "différance", a pun on "difference" and "deferment", by which he refers to the two aspects of language. First, in a signifying system, meaning is produced due to a word's "difference" from other words, secondly, it is constantly "deferred" because a final signified is not reached.

allow the presence, the ultimate truth, to be disrupted. In other words, the metaphysically present and immediate speech has its historical value not because it is inherently and essentially closer to truth but because it accompanies power structures that assign it a hierarchical value. In this sense, the dichotomy between speech and writing is arbitrary, and thus can be challenged.

In deciphering the ways by which structures function to govern meaning, Derrida not only breaks down but also subverts the hierarchy between speech and writing. For him, writing comes before speech since without difference and repetition there is no truth (Rivkin and Ryan, 2017, p. 452). The apparent primacy of speech is an illusion because speech can only be possible if it is preceded by writing (Allison and Garver, 1973, p. xl). Though paradoxical this may seem, Derrida asserts that writing is a more useful tool to understand the functions of language for it is the domain where signifiers are always generative "introducing a temporal aspect into signification which undermines any fusion between signifier and signified" (Newton, 1997, p. 112). Written signs have "a semiotic independence" which causes meaning to be always deferred as it will be produced in an endless way (Newton, 1997, p. 112). For these reasons, writing poses a threat to logos, that is, to speech and meaning because it produces conditions by which it is possible to explore the working mechanisms of *structures* in a manner that reflects the way language, a system based on difference and deferment, works. In *Speech and Phenomena*, Derrida argues "although there is no expression and meaning without speech, not everything in speech is 'expressive'" (Derrida, 1973, p. 31). In addition, he contends that the affinity of the voice with presence is a mere simulation, and "the history of spoken language is the archives of this simulation" (1973, p. 15). Through such arguments, Derrida not only questions the hierarchy between speech and writing but points to the superiority of writing since it is what makes speech possible.

On a final note in this section, Derridean critique of speech-writing dichotomy has implications that extend beyond the confines of the epistemology of writing and speech; it also weaves a commentary on human subjectivity through an implicit emphasis on two ontological spaces, namely, the domains of speakers and writers (or the voice versus silence). These two epistemological models – speech and writing – also address distinct forms of selfhood in that they constitute certain *categories* which attribute specific qualities to different subjectivities. For instance, Derridean critique interrogates the assumed category of speech (and thus speakers) as the domain of superior access to knowledge and of category of writing (and thus writers) as the realm of secondary importance. These categories imply that while speech is constituted by active, immediate, and closer-to-truth human *voice*, writing is the domain of *silence* where the absence of acoustics hinders direct access to knowledge and the human subject behind it. This is a point that Patrick Colm Hogan also makes. He argues that in phonocentric view "presence is manifest most fully in oral speech, in the human voice" whereas in writing one finds "the absence of voice" and "the loss of presence through the deferral of communication" (2000, p. 249). In this context, the epistemological split between speech and writing also produces an ontological difference between presence and absence and voice and silence. Following this line of thinking, it can be argued that Derridean critique of speech-writing dichotomy is also a challenge to the entrenched hierarchy between voice and silence since these categories rest on arbitrarily formed assumptions. As he repeatedly emphasizes the value of writing and its ontological nature as equally important as oral communication, Derrida makes a case for a non-phonocentric view of human subjectivity where agency, presence, absence, voicedness and silence need to be reconsidered on a non-hierarchical basis.

## Elizabeth Cary: An Early Practitioner of Écriture Féminine

The Derridean emphasis on the epistemology and ontology of writing became one of the reference points for the feminist theory in the 1970s. Writing and textuality in general offered an important locale for the exploration of issues concerning women's empowerment under patriarchal culture.

This necessitated a thorough analysis of the factors that lead to women's oppression within and through discourses as well as material experiences. In this context, the Derridean emphasis on writing as an important tool of agency was combined by feminist theorists with psychoanalytical frameworks, primarily those of Jacques Lacan. "Écriture feminine," as it is usually named, was one such output where writing and psychoanalytical theories of the self were amalgamated to understand the historical, cultural, and psychological roots of women's oppression. Today, "écriture feminine" refers to the kind of literature which moves away from conventional styles of writing and delineates the relation between female body and feminine language. It emerged in France in the 1970s through the works of such feminist theorists as Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva who insist on the distinctiveness of female sexual experience and on an affinity between female body and women's writing. They also point to the restrictive influences of phallocentrism (male-oriented set of power relations) on women's bodies, sexualities and lives. Their main contention is that language, literature and culture are all built upon women's exclusion and subordination. With the aim of inspiring women to challenge phallocentric prescriptions which determine how they think and speak, they turn to (Lacanian) psychoanalysis which offers theories of preverbal development of the self.

Famously, Lacan asserts that "the unconscious is structured like a language," and as Macey clarifies, according to him, there is no direct relation between the signifier and the signified. Meaning is inclined to get out of control, and stability is provided by the phallus and the name-of-the-father, for which Derrida accuses him of perpetuating logocentrism and phallogocentrism (2000, p. 223). In Lacan's formulation of the pre-linguistic development of the self, before the emergence of the sense of self, the infant is in the Imaginary where there is an idealised integration with the mother. The imaginary is beyond grammar and rules like poetic language (Barry, 2009, p. 109). In this realm, the child is in the pre-linguistic, pre-Oedipal stage where the self is not separated from the rest of the world. The child is in a paradise-like realm in which there is no desire or lack (p. 124). In the mirror-stage between six-eighteen months, the child sees its own image in the mirror and perceives itself as a unified being. This is also when the child begins to enter the language system which is marked by rules and restrictions associated with the father which Lacan describes as the "Symbolic" that corresponds to the domain of patriarchal order and logic (p. 109). The Symbolic is where language acquisition happens and the child starts to be exposed to phallocentric convictions, which goes on for life.

Hélène Cixous, who coined the term "écriture feminine," argues that language generates "patriarchal binary thought", through which people see the world in terms of binaries that determine how they think (Tyson, 2006, p. 100). According to her, women have to create an "écriture féminine" based on the relation with the mother to resist their exclusion from culture. Although such a language derived from the infant-mother relationship already exists within the unconscious, it remains suppressed due to the domination of logocentric language. This feminine language distinguishes from male-centred language as it allows free play of signifiers rather than underpinning certainties or rigidities (Newton, 1997, p. 210). However, Cixous does not suggest that male language should be totally forsaken in favour of feminine language; rather, she emphasizes that since feminine body differs from male body "and that language is a translation which 'speaks through the body,'" women must express themselves in their own ways (p. 211).

In "The Laugh of the Medusa," where she coined the term, Cixous explicates that for centuries, writing was associated with reason, and therefore, with men; thus, women who attempted to write could easily be labelled as abnormal or unruly. For fear of being labelled as such, they avoided writing. Therefore, in her essay, she calls women to writing: "Women must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing" (1976, p. 875), emphasizing that women should focus on their own experiences in their writings, and their writing must inspire other women to

reverberate their personal experiences through writing. Moreover, she argues women should take their bodies as their source for their writings: "[W]hy don't you write? Write! Writing is for you, you are for you; your body is yours, take it" (p. 876). Like their sexuality which is not uniform, their writing should be fluid to reflect their sexualities and bodily experiences. As she highlights in *The Newly Born Woman*, women have been alienated from their bodies: "She has not been able to live in her 'own' house, her very body. […] They haven't gone exploring in their house. Their sex still frightens them. Their bodies, which they haven't dared enjoy, have been colonized" (Cixous and Clément, 1996, p. 68). She suggests women reunite with their bodies, take it as their source of inspiration and reflect its multiplicity, fluidity, versatility and openness in their writings.

The connection between the body, language and writing remains an important point in feminist theory, especially when analysing the possibilities for a feminist style of thinking and writing, as Irigaray did. While Cixous emphasizes the need for women's experiences to be written down, Irigaray also highlights the importance of women creating their own language. In the *Speculum of the Other Woman*, Irigaray critiques psychoanalysis for being based on patriarchal ideologies and criticizes Lacan's emphasis on the Symbolic (1985a). As Robbins clarifies, she insists that women should develop their own linguistic systems and representation modes which will let their speech be heard (2000, p. 155). She defines this speech as "parler-femme" which means "speaking women", "speaking about women" and "women speaking to women", which, like écriture féminine, rejects male discourses and celebrates the plurality of female sexuality. In addition, it rejects the linearity of realist and phallocentric writing modes of the Symbolic order (p. 155).

For Irigaray, it can only be possible through developing nonpatriarchal ways of thinking and speaking, that is, generating a feminine language she calls "womanspeak," that women can overthrow the restricting influences of patriarchy. According to her, the source of such language is in female sexuality which is "far more diversified, more multiple in its differences, more complex, more subtle, than is commonly imagined" (Irigaray, 1985b, p. 28). As she underlines in *This Sex Which is Not One*, this "*[s]imultaneity* is its [feminine writing's] 'proper' aspect - a proper(ty) that is never fixed in its possible identity […]. It is always *fluid*" (1985b, p. 79) and women should echo this fluidity in literature.

In contrast to Cixous and Irigaray, Kristeva does not believe in écriture féminine or womanspeak; instead, she asserts it is only possible to cope with patriarchy's oppression if men and women can gain access to "the *semiotic* dimension of language" (Tyson, 2006, p. 103). For her, language has two dimensions. The first is the "symbolic", the domain where words operate and meanings are attributed to them, and the second is the "semiotic" which involves such elements as body language, rhythm and intonation[2] (p. 103). She contends the semiotic is a period when babies have a relationship with their mothers through gestures and rhythms, which is the infants' first speech learnt through contact with nonverbal communication associated with the mother's body. Therefore, the semiotic is beyond patriarchal control, and women should reach this semiotic dimension of unconscious through art and literature (Tyson, 2006, p. 104).

As evident through this theoretical review of what can be called "women's literature," the relationship between "writing" and the female experience has been a recurrent focus for much of the history of feminist theory. While French feminists may propose different concepts for framing feminist thought, what they all agree on is the fact that writing is a fundamentally important means to express feminist mode of "being." Yet, while anachronistic it may sound, women's literature produced much long before the emergence of French feminist theories also provides significant examples where the relationship between the material and bodily experiences of women and writing is explored in ways that echo the feminist arguments of Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva. Born

[2] See Kristeva, J. (1984). *Revolution in poetic language* (M. Waller, Trans.). Columbia UP.

in 1585 to a wealthy family with a considerable opportunity for an education in "French, Spanish, Italian, Latin, and Hebrew" (Bevington et al., 2002, p. 615), the English playwright Elizabeth Cary and her limited yet exceptional playwriting career exemplify one such case. Thanks to her family background, Cary had enough money for paper and quills, and thus, had the means to write (Ferguson, 2002, p. 483), yet, her class, which provided her with financial opportunities to write, also imposed rigid rules on her literary career and bodily experiences, which in a way determined the genre she chose and her relationship with her audience (p. 484). The social norms of the period expected women to perform *silence* as a general model of living. As Peter Stallybrass clarifies, in this period, women's dignity depended on whether they kept silent within public spaces and sustained respectable lives in domestic spheres[3] (1986, p. 127). An open mouth of a woman carried a number of dangerous implications including sexual ones, and within a culture like this which was nested in the dichotomy between male voice and female silence, it was assumed that fame was only for men; a woman could not be popular among other people as it would ruin her name (Jones, 1986, p. 74). Fame through rhetoric and public speech was predominantly a male privilege, so it was not possible for a woman of Elizabeth Cary's class to write commercial plays performed at the theatres, address a general audience or achieve fame with her work. As a result of such discursive as well as material limitations on women's experiences, especially within the theatre world which Cary was rather fond of, it was closet drama that offered women playwrights of the period an aesthetic space to follow their artistic instincts. As M. G. Nesler declares, women dramatists of closet drama[4] like Cary both "undermin[ed] those rules, […] [and] generated disruptive compliance" (2012, pp. 364-365). Although they seemed to obey the social rules which required their imprisonment in the house, they found ways of being a part of the dramatic activities.

Closet dramas, which include long soliloquies and monologues with two or three actors on the stage and a chorus, are written to be read personally or among several people, and they are not performed on the stage[5]. As Gutierrez underlines, what is in the foreground is "philosophical discussion and poetic meditation" rather than action (1991, p. 237). Another important aspect of closet drama is its relation to "political discourse" (Gutierrez, 1991, p. 237); "[it] is a vehicle for direct exposition of political ideas" (p. 237), especially to declare "political dissent" (p. 237) without being exposed to censorship (Purkiss, 1998, p. xviii). That is, the playwrights could share subversive ideas with other women by negotiating with social norms that hinder active participation in theatrical activities. "Within closet spaces, writing was considered a silent and admissible performance for women because it occurred in ostensibly isolated locations" (Nesler 2012, p. 364). Through these silent plays, female authors could enter the homes of other women "turn[ing] the home[s] into […] performative space[s] filled with a "greate companie"' (Nesler, 2009, p. 84). Thus, silence was "an active, powerful mode of expression" (Nesler 2009, p. 4) for women. It was a form of feminine language which enabled the playwrights like Cary to address their audience and share their experiences with other women. The silent dramatic mode was a delogocentric space where phallocentric authority over meaning could be subverted from a safe distance. Therefore, *The Tragedy of Mariam*, a silent play which echoes the silence of its playwright's mouth and her forced silence in social settings, can be regarded as an example of écriture feminine. In a way which echoes Cixous's ideas, Cary reflects her own bodily experience -

[3] For a survey of plays from the period which showcase female silence see Luckyj, C. A. (1993). "A Moving Rhetoricke": women's silences and Renaissance texts. *Renaissance Drama*, New series, Perspectives on Renaissance Drama, *24*, 33-56. Jstor. https://www.jstor.org/stable/41917294

[4] Some of the other female dramatists of closet drama were Mary Sidney (1561-1621), Margret Lucas Cavendish (1623-1673) and Annie Finch (1661-1720).

[5] For other closet drama examples see Gutierrez, N. A. (1991). Valuing Mariam: genre study and feminist analysis. *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, *10*(2), 233-251. Jstor. https://www.jstor.org/stable/464016

the silence of her mouth - in a silent form. In line with Irigaray's opinions, the silent dramatic genre poses a threat to the Symbolic as it is not exposed to control by patriarchal authority. In addition, it relates to the nonverbal communication of the infants in the Semiotic, which is free from any patriarchal scrutiny as proposed by Kristeva.

Through closet dramas, women transgressed "dramatic boundaries" and "created a narrative about effective non-vocal expression and its generation of authority"; their stories were heard by other women (Nesler 2009, p. 4). Through their texts, women dramatists had the chance to enter the "closets" of other women and shape their opinions. However, their teachings could be far from reinforcing the status-quo since they could "manipulate silence and instruct their readers on how to do the same" (Nesler 2009, p. 10). They could teach women how to make use of their silence in an excessively patriarchal household in which it was the most distinctive feature of a good wife.

## Graphina: An Embodiment of Writing and the Silent Victoress

*The Tragedy of Mariam*, a Senecan tragedy and an example of closet drama, has a unique place in English theatre since it is the first original play by a woman.[6] The story, which takes place in only one day in Ancient Judea in 29 B.C.E, retells the history of Herod and Mariam as told by the Jewish historian Josephus in *Antiquities* translated by Thomas Lodge. Although the play is thought to have been written between 1602 and 1604, as Ferguson clarifies, it remained as a manuscript until it was printed in 1613. It was not printed again until 1914, and by the 1990s, only scholars were interested in the play (2002, p. 482), which was never performed[7] (Ferguson, 1991, p. 235).

*The Tragedy of Mariam* focuses on a series of power-related issues taking effect on the crossover between gender, language, and social norms. While the play is titled after its female lead Mariam whose tragedy frames the general flow of things, it in fact weaves a dramatic narrative in which various female experience come together to reveal the difficulty of achieving agency in a patriarchal culture. When the play opens, gender issues instantly come to the surface. Upon hearing the rumours that Herod has been killed in Rome by Caesar, Mariam reveals how she feels about his presumed death. What is unexpected for the moment is Mariam's linguistic explicitness in addressing her complex relationship with her husband at a moment of grief like this:

> Oft have I wished that I from him were free;[8]
> Oft have I wished that he might lose his breath;
> Oft have I wished his carcass dead to see. (p. 623, 16-18)
> [….]
> Then why grieves Mariam Herod's death to hear? (p. 624, 38)

These lines clearly display the emotional stalemate Mariam is in due to the recent unexpected news. On the one hand, she feels glad since the revenge of her brother Aristobulus and her grandfather Hyrcanus, who were killed by Herod, is taken. On the other hand, she is not at first entirely joyful because Herod in his own 'cruel' way loved her. Yet, Mariam ultimately confesses her hatred of him upon learning that he is alive: "With solemn vows I have forsworn his bed / […] To live with him I so profoundly hate" (p. 647, 16, 20), explicitly addressing the deep rift between

[6] Before Elizabeth Cary, some women in England translated or adapted other people's plays and the Countess of Pembroke wrote a short pastoral dialogue. However, it was Cary who made up her own plot with her own characters (Pearse, 1977, p. 601).

[7] To read on a counter-argument see Hamamra, B. T. (2018). "Tell thou my lord thou saw'st me lose my breath": silence, speech, and authorial identity in Cary's The Tragedy of Mariam. *ANQ A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes and Reviews*, *32*(2), 84-92. DOI:10.1080/0895769X.2018.1471980. https://doi.org/10.1080/0895769X.2018.1471980

[8] All references to the play are to Cary, E. (2002). *The tragedy of Mariam*. In D. Bevington et al. (Eds.), *English renaissance drama: a norton anthology* (pp. 621-671). W. W. Norton & Company.

the spouses.

A similar mode of straightforwardness is visible with Alexandra who reproaches Mariam for weeping for Herod. She is content with Herod's death and insults and curses him as he murdered her son and father to ensure his own succession. Like Mariam, Alexandra openly announces her hate for Herod by insulting his race as "[b]ase" and "damnèd" (p. 625, 6). Spoken language plays a vital role here in expressing women's plight at the hand of men. In this vein, Alexandra's curses and insults can be regarded as a direct, non-mediated challenge to patriarchal portrayal of women as silent beings. As Templin underlines, uttering curses is a subversion of female silence since it provides women with a certain amount of social agency which they normally do not have (2014, p. 1).[9] Through her sharp tongue, Alexandra releases her anger towards Herod for killing her father and son, which she cannot do in any other way. Her curses are Alexandra's only weapons to raise her voice in a patriarchal society which constantly silences women.

Whether through curses or expressions of emotional complexity, the beginning of the play portrays the significance of language for the articulation of agency, and the play offers a rich repertoire in terms of the number of outspoken women. Salome appears as the third female voice who accuses Mariam of searching for a new husband; she and Mariam direct insults and charges at each other. Salome questions the sexual double standards of the time which grant the right of divorce only to men:

> Why should such privilege to man be given? (p. 629, 45)
> […]
> I'll be the custom-breaker, and begin
> To show my sex the way to freedom's door. (p. 629, 49-50)

In this monologue, Salome challenges the patriarchal norms which do not regard women equal to men in marriage and decides to be the first women to divorce at her own will. As such examples denote, Mariam and Alexandra can express their resentment for Herod as they believe him to be dead. As Rose comments, they are pleased with Herod's death for it releases their desires which they had to repress because of the tyrant's excessive control on their personal lives (2010, p. 211). As regards Salome, she is not a conventional feminine figure for she announces her intention of transgressing the gender roles the society was imposing on women at the time. In the first four scenes of the play, the female voice dominates the text which receives a critical outlook from the chorus, with implications that the dramatic space is ripe with tension between opposing voices.

At the centre of such tension is the very notion of speech itself. For instance, when Salome converses with Silleus about her plans to divorce, Constabarus reprimands her for not avoiding an open conversation with a stranger (p. 631, 1-4). Although Constabarus does not know what she is talking to Silleus about, he accuses her of smearing his name. In his view, his wife's talk to a man is shameful, which displays the gender-bound power dynamics and social norms regarding women's free speech at the time. Juxtaposed to such open talks coming from major female characters, 2.1 depicts a scene of private talk between Graphina, a slave girl, "[t]he only character whose name is not found in Josephus's text or in Lodge's translation of it" (Ferguson 1991, p. 237), and Pheroras, Herod's brother. Pheroras announces his love for Graphina, and adds that, for his love for Graphina, he rejected his brother's command to marry his niece. While he is speaking, Graphina is silent. Pheroras becomes restless by her silence and prompts her to speak. By his compulsion, Graphina speaks:

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[9] See Ünlü, E. (2017). *The Witch, The Witch of Edmonton, Vinegar Tom ve Byrthrite oyunlarında cadı imgesinin feminist analizi*. [Master's Thesis, Ankara University]. p. 65.
https://tez.yok.gov.tr/UlusalTezMerkezi/tezSorguSonucYeni.jsp

I have admirèd your affection long,
And cannot yet therein a reason find.
Your hand hath lifted me from lowest state
To highest eminency, wondrous grace,
And me, your handmaid, have you made your mate,
Though all but you alone do count me base.
You have preserved me pure at my request,
Though you so weak a vassal might constrain
To yield to your high will. Then, last not best,
In my respect a princess you disdain. (p. 636, 55-64)

In these lines, it seems that as Ferguson underlines, "Graphina tells her lover only what he wants to hear, when he wants to hear it"; therefore, hers is a "safe speech" (Ferguson, 1991, p. 238). Since she is aware women have to be careful with whom they talk to, or what they talk about, she speaks only to Pheroras, and tells him what a lover wants to hear. Her avoidance from speaking to any men but Pheroras shows she is conscious of the patriarchal impositions of the time on women, and, through her silence, she displays her own experience without being condemned by phallocentric social discourse. Her silence might at first seem like a victory for patriarchy, but Graphina never speaks the language of patriarchy other than in this brief scene which marks her ascent up the social hierarchy. In this way, she on the one hand challenges the Symbolic order of patriarchy where women are forced to adopt male language and on the other hand acquires a place within that order by advancing a communicative model of her own that both protects her from social condemnation and offers her an articulation of agency.

With the play's juxtaposition of different subject positions represented by Graphina and other major characters, the tension surrounding the female speech acquires much more visibility. In 3.3, Mariam has a private conversation with Sohemus in which she hears from him Herod is alive and declares she wishes he was dead. Sohemus criticizes her for her outspokenness: "Unbridled speech is Mariam's disgrace, /And will endanger her without desart" (p. 648, 65-66). Speech, as a locale of communication, takes a dangerous turn upon receiving a warning from Sohemus, a representative figure of patriarchy, which means that speech has the potential to operate beyond the signs it simply incorporates for communicative reasons. It is a space for political discourse which may reproduce yet at the same time subvert phallocentric power dynamics, so Mariam's outspokenness bears a dangerous potential for the continuing operation of patriarchal discourses. For instance, when Herod wants to find out what Mariam did in his absence, he asks Salome in an inquisitive manner that focuses on her agency of speech: "have you heard her speak?" (p. 660, 69), pointing at an affinity between women's speech and promiscuity as underlined by the patriarchal society. Salome insinuates that Mariam had a relationship with Sohemus and Mariam is executed at Herod's behest.

The women in the play, except for Graphina, are predominantly outspoken, which becomes further evident in their attempts to transgress patriarchal norms through their verbal communicative preferences. However, speech is not presented in the play as a functional tool for self-expression for women since it does not provide them with any form of agency or power. On the contrary, the women's desire for a share in the oral universe of the play is swiftly met with harsh social condemnation, one that either cripples their ability to relate to social life in general or exterminates their social existence altogether, as evident in Mariam's tragedy. Furthermore, the kind of oral activities that most women are able to maintain is hardly productive: Alexandra and Doris can be outspoken only when Herod is absent; Salome is denounced by her husband for her private talk to another man; Mariam is condemned by the Chorus for transgressing the patriarchal boundaries with her speech. Graphina, on the other hand, evades social surveillance completely

through her strategic silence that she maintains throughout the play. As Nesler comments, Graphina can express herself so well that she even suppresses Pheroras's voice when she speaks (2012, p. 374). The Chorus does not condemn her because she is "an undecipherable and unknowable text" (Hamamra 2018, p. 89). That is how she can avoid scrutiny while making her voice being heard (Nesler 2012, p. 378). Thus, Graphina, who is generally overlooked by the Chorus and the critics, can be an example of how to have a verbal narrative without being condemned for transgressing prescribed boundaries for women (Nesler 2012, p. 364). It is even possible to argue that Graphina's ascension in the social ladder shows that speech is not even necessary for communicating with one's social environment and having a significant portion of agentic capacity.

In the light of such arguments, it can be claimed that Graphina's character rests on a series of ontological elements that reverberate the dynamics of *textuality*. Instead of following a communicative ideal like that of other women characters where meaning is direct, immediate and potentially hazardous in an ultra-conservative society, Graphina opts for a model of relationality which is nested in deferral and difference with multiple implications, like the deconstructive aura of a text that Derrida and feminist theorists argue for. As the very identity of Graphina is open to various interpretations, she also subverts the models of intentionality that one usually finds in a conventional drama. What does Graphina actually want? What are her true intentions and feelings? Since she very successfully evades the sociality that other women characters are embedded in, it is not really easy to answer such questions. In this respect, it is possible to read Graphina's character as an allegory of textuality in that her character is both very rich in meaning and open to difference as she does not invite immediate interpretation. In a way, following Hamamra (2018), Graphina is a text herself in that, instead of choosing to take side in phonocentric power conflicts, she embodies the plurality of voices that the silence of a text possesses.

Interestingly, a number of critics have commented on the meaning of Graphina's name and argued that Graphina resembles a text not just ontologically but also in name. According to Nesler, her name derives from the Latin root for "writing" (2012, p. 365). For Hamamra, it comes from "graphein," which means "to write" (2018, p. 85). Ferguson adds the name derives from the Greek "graphesis," which means "writing" (1991, p. 238). For Bell, too, it is a pun on "graphesis" (2007, p. 23). According to Jonathan Goldberg, the addition of the "-ina," the feminizing diminutive, makes her name mean "writing as a woman" (1997, p. 164). Thus, Graphina in a way means "écriture féminine" and exemplifies how feminine language characterized by silence in the play can help women to overthrow the supremacy of male-centred language and go beyond patriarchal portrayals of femininity, making their own voices be heard. All in all, she shows that "[w]riting and vocality are equally effective forms of speech" (Nesler, 2012, p. 377).

## Conclusion

The female characters in the play - Mariam, Alexandra, Salome and Doris - declare their anger and content through their speech. However, their speech does not help them display their agency or identities. Instead, they are regarded as unruly women by the men around them. Graphina, who embodies the ontological dynamics of writing, is the only woman in the play who seems to be content with her life. Using her silence as a strategy to win Pheroras's love, the servant girl becomes the wife of the king's brother. As her rhetorical speech also reveals, she is an intelligent woman who is aware of the social norms and the expectations of society from women. She knows how to protect her name from any shame that any public speech to a man might cause. Through marriage to Pheroras, the brother of the king, she socially rises from the lowest class to the wife of the king's brother, which was a success and exhibition of power and authority for a woman at the time. In this way, within the socio-political dynamics of the time, she exemplifies that writing, which she embodies, can be even more effective than speech as a means of power and authority,

and constituting a presence out of absence, like Elizabeth Cary, she questions the speech-oriented society from within. However, it is necessary to be careful about one point here. Neither Cary's dramatic text nor Graphina's character implies that women should simply keep silent and comply with patriarchal norms in order to lead acceptable lives. On the contrary, as it was previously stated, since the play is primarily focusing on the issues of power in a rather conservative society, this tragedy addresses the need for women to carefully read into social circumstances and make strategic and smart moves which would help women in their search for further agency. In other words, the play shows that a careful analysis of materiality is necessary for claiming a share in power relations which would otherwise crush marginalized people like women. This is to say that it might not even be necessary for women to join the phonocentric order of things since they can find political potentials in even the most depoliticized form of communication like silence.

As a woman, Cary was supposed to be silent. By choosing a silent genre like closet drama, she writes about herself in her own personal way reflecting her experience, and thus, producing feminine writing. Her forced silence determines both the content and the form of her writing. Therefore, the play can be an example of écriture féminine as theorized by Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva. As proposed by Cixous, Cary wrote about specific experiences of women in her own period. Silence was a form of language for Cary that allowed her to connect to other women. Through this particular linguistic system, she got the chance to speak to women about women's experiences as suggested by Irigaray and, as Kristeva offers, could go beyond the Symbolic through literature. Thus, silence did not prevent her from achieving success as a writer. As a contemporary of great male playwrights such as Christopher Marlowe, William Shakespeare and Ben Jonson who became remarkably popular through frequent performances of their texts, she could achieve immortality like them, yet with an unperformed play, which is still read and studied today, challenging the supposed superiority of speech in Western thought.

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