

“CONSORTING WITH THE BASE ARABIAN”; *THE TRAGEDIE
OF MARIAM, FAIRE QUEENE OF JEWRY* (1613), FROM
DISCURSIVE AMBIVALENCE TO ORIENTALIST
BENEVOLENCE

Nizar F. Hermes*

Abstract: Through discussing issues related to the play's subgenre(s) and especially alterity, I will present what I see as the ambivalent discourses at work in The Tragedy of Mariam which make it almost impossible to come up with a conclusive verdict on the subversiveness or conservatism of the text which, by and large, has dominated its critical reception. This stands in stark opposition to what some would call, not without truth, as the play's orientalist discourse. The latter can be traced in several textual instances, but notably in the stereotypical representation of the Arabian Silleus, the exotic and erotic lover/seducer of the play's anti-heroine Salome, which, I will argue, does not only reminisce of medieval anti-Saracen rhetoric, but equally it coalesces early modern literary and non-literary demonization of the Moors. I propose it is always legitimate to question the applicability of Edward Said's theory to the medieval and early modern encounters between the Islamic Orient and the West. This is especially true when it is a fact that, and in great part the Orient was conquering not conquered, Said's strong argument that the West, in its search for self-definition, has constructed Arabs/Muslims as the ultimate Other par excellence—exotic, lustful, carnal, cruel, cunning, irrational, and emotional-- is still valid for those interested in exploring what they strongly see as medieval and early modern discourses of Orientalism. The Tragedy of Mariam, I will argue, is not an exception

*“He loves, I love; what then can be the cause, Keeps me [from] being the Arabian’s wife?”
(The Tragedy of Mariam, I.4.37-38, 61)*

In the last two decades, there has been growing interest in Elizabeth Cary's *The Tragedie of Mariam, Faire Queene of Jewry* (1613) [hereafter *The Tragedy of Mariam*.] This exciting attention has somehow been compromised by the polarizing controversy over the “cultural work,” to borrow Jane Tompkins' phrase (25), of the first (known) play to be published by an English woman. In the example of the pioneering work of Betty S. Travitsky, Barbara K. Lewalski, Margaret W. Ferguson, Elaine Beilin and others, the bulk of scholarship on *The Tragedy of Mariam*, and to quote William Hamlin, has “concentrated on the play's explorations of women's “public voice,” female resistance to patriarchal tyranny,

*Dr. NIZAR F. HERMES, Lecturer in Near Eastern Studies and Comparative Studies, Department of Near Eastern Studies, Princeton University.
Email: nhermes@princeton.edu.

and contradictions within prevailing gender and political discourses” (3).¹ Essentially, two conflicting readings have circulated leading almost to a critical debate nothing short of an intellectual *cul-de-sac*. The first has highlighted the radicalism of the play, applauding its subversive resistance to patriarchy and monarchy, whereas, the second has stressed the play's conservatism, adducing Cary's consolidation of female submissiveness both as conjugal and political subject.²

By most accounts, it is not an exaggeration to state that few have gone beyond the gender/politics debate in their 'materialist' investigation of Cary's historically and culturally rich text. Many would agree, however, that there is much more in *The Tragedy of Mariam* than gender and politics. Not only is this the case when it comes to the relatively neglected issues of genre, but also, and mainly, the largely unstudied themes and motifs of orientalist alterity.

Through discussing issues related to the play's subgenre (s) and especially alterity, I will try to argue that what I see as the ambivalent discourses that are at work in *The Tragedy of Mariam* make it almost impossible to come up with a conclusive verdict on the subversiveness or conservatism of the text which, by far and large, has dominated its critical reception. This stands in stark opposition to what some would call, not without truth, as the play's orientalist discourse. The latter can be traced in several textual instances, but notably in the stereotypical representation of the Arabian Silleus, the exotic and erotic lover/seducer of the play's anti-heroine Salome, which, I will argue, does not only reminisce of medieval anti-Saracen rhetoric, but equally it coalesces early modern literary and non-literary demonization of the Moors.

As aptly demonstrated by Reina Green and others, the score of critics who have explored the issue of genre and its ideological function in Cary's *The Tragedy of Mariam*, have focused on political themes and gender motifs related to the closet drama and the Senecean revenge motifs in particular without giving much, if any, attention to the Aristotelian imprints of the drama (462).³ The latter,

¹Prominent among the first group of critics who reads *The Tragedy of Mariam* as a radically subversive text, one can cite Margaret W. Ferguson and Barbara Kiefer Lewalski. As for the second group, one has in mind Louise Schleiner and Betty S. Travitsky.

²See, for examples, Shannon, Laurie J. "The Tragedie of Mariam: Cary's Critique of the Terms of Founding Social Discourse." (*English Literary Renaissance*, 24 (1994):135-53), Boyd M. Berry, "Feminine Construction of Patriarchy; Or What's Comic in *The Tragedy of Mariam*." (*Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England*, 7 (1995): 257-274), Karen L. Raber, "Gender and the Political Subject in *Tragedy of Mariam*." (*Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 2 (1995): 321-343), Alexandra G Bennett, "Female Performativity in *The Tragedy of Mariam*." (*Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 2 (2000): 293-309), Heather E. Ostman, "Backbiters, Flatterers, and Monarchs: Domestic Politics in *The Tragedy of Mariam*," (*Images of Matter: Essays on British Literature of the Middle Ages and Renaissance*. U of Delaware P, 2005: 183-205), Danielle Clarke, "The Tragedy of *Mariam* and the Politics of Marriage." (*Early Modern English Drama: A Critical Companion*. Oxford UP, 2006, 248-259), and Nandra Perry, "The Sound of Silence: Elizabeth Cary and the Christian Hero." (*English Literary Renaissance*, 1(2008): 106 – 141).

³See, Nancy A. Gutierrez, "Valuing Mariam: Genre Study and Feminist Analysis." (*Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 2(1991): 233 – 251), Carol Mejia LaPerle, "Access and

in my view, can be of much help when it comes to unveiling the discursive ambivalence of the play. Related to this is one’s conviction of the paramount importance of Aristotle’s *Poetics* to the Renaissance concept of genre. As noted by Rosalie L. Collie, “Aristotle’s *Poetics*, together with Horace’s long-known *Ars Poetica*, the epistle to *The Pisos*, has established Renaissance genre”(4). If read as a classical Aristotelian tragedy—as I see it— *The Tragedy of Mariam* can expose its inherently and ultimately ambivalent handling of gender and politics.

By definition and tradition, tragedy is conceived as one the most patriarchal and 'masculinist' genres. A reality that could have hindered Cary in her possible effort at coming up with a radically eloquent “public voice.” One should not, however, turn blind to Cary’s discursive manipulation of the genre. Tragedy, in some significant ways, cannot be appreciated outside the Western patriarchal literary history. Likewise, tragedy in its Aristotelian paradigm defines and confines the tragic within the boundaries of the masculine. “The heroes who remain lie between all these. They are not servant,” Aristotle affirms in his magisterial *Poetics* before asserting that the tragic heroes' sufferings “are caused less by innate wickedness than because of *hamartia* (error). *Hamartia*, it is to be added, is the failing in understanding or moral character, which leads the tragic hero to a disastrous choice of action (*Poetics*, 17).

By referring to the Aristotelian definition of the tragic hero and *hamartia*, I want to suggest that if we assume that Mariam is a tragic heroine—which she really appears to be, at least since she seems to embody Aristotle's characterization of the hero’s “high degree and reputation” (17) — her death must be the result of a *hamartia*, or a failure in understanding and/or judgment. “Mariam,” as noted by Ina Habermann in her insightful study *Staging Slander and Gender in Early Modern England* (2003), “[is] beset by difficulties and implicated into a conflict about loyalty and honour worthy of a Hamlet” (143). Indeed, the single most tragic *hamartia* committed by Mariam is her unprecedented challenge of Herod, who is both her husband and her king. In other words, it is her refusal to meet him in a conventional wifely manner when he returned from Rome. Habermann is worth quoting again:

Cary explores the moral dilemma women experience in trying to live up to the complex and conflicting requirement of society [...] Additionally, they must not only respect their husband's ill and belief but must embrace it for themselves. Mariam's *hamartia*, her tragic error, consists in privileging “human” over female honour, which must necessarily result in a clash with the social framework-- “if guiltily eternal be my death.” (150).

This can be clearly seen from the messages of the play's choruses, which according to Aristotle, “should be treated as one of the actors and incorporated in the plot” (22), a thing Cary appears to 'religiously' implement. The choruses, as many have suggested, are critical of Mariam’s transgression of her wifely duties.

Agency in Elizabeth Cary's *The Tragedy of Mariam*: Early Modern Closet Drama and the Spatialization of Power.”(*Literature Compass*, 3(2006): 80 – 94), and Marta Straznicky, *Privacy, Playreading and Women's Closet Drama, 1550-1700* (Cambridge University Press, 2005).

It is clear, then, that Cary fashioned the transgression to fit the concept of *hamartia*. Furthermore, errors as depicted by the choruses are of a corruptive and destructive nature because they are enemies to innocent people (Mariam) whose innocence is obliterated when they commit those errors (Mariam is no longer innocent):

To hear a tale with ears prejudicate
It spoils the judgment, and corrupts the sense.
That human error given to every state,
Is greater enemy to innocence?
It makes us foolish, heady, rash, and unjust
It makes us never try before we trust. (II. 118-23, 84)

This particular chorus is important in several respects, not least because it hints at Mariam as being transformed into a foolish, stubborn, hasty, and unwise person. The error she has made has moved her from the realm of innocence and sanity to the realm of culpability and insanity. Therefore, the tragic *hamartia* invokes our indictment of Mariam. It is an error to challenge husbands and kings even the like of Herod. The above and other choruses, as demonstrated by Kimiko Yoshida, are not only reflective of ancient Jewish society, but equally of early modern England (35).

Aside from the concept of *hamartia*, which encodes wifely submission, the play's implementation of Aristotelian of unity, linearity, and causality can be said to hinder the articulation of the discourse of subversion stressed by many. Cary's failure in initiating a subversive discourse can be seen as her failure in producing a discourse of an "*l'écriture féminine*," to quote French Feminist Hélène Cixous. Tragedy, according to Aristotle, is "the imitation of an action which is whole, completed and substantial. By whole, I mean that it has a beginning, middle, and an end" (11). This unity, linearity, and causality are very conspicuous in *The Tragedy of Mariam*, a fact that contradicts the feminist discourse of writing through internalizing the female body and *jouissance*, as a strategy of celebrating the feminine. Accordingly, one may posit that part of the failure of *The Tragedy of Mariam* in adopting an overt subversive discourse can be attributed to the reliance on the 'phallogocentric' discourse of linearity, unity and causality. By most accounts, Miranda Garno Nesler seems to go too far when she writes:

Cary demonstrates how gendered narratives complicate the literary territory of closet drama. She presents female writing as effective when partially covert the way that closet drama itself is constructed. Yet, in writing, she unmasks that covert effort and makes it public. Writing is both a performance of public speaking and, simultaneously, privatized feminine behavior. Such an activity critiques the tension between those two opposing positions in which women exist; the juxtaposition of public and private, or of performance and reading, reveals that women's writing, silence, and peaking are encouraged as performance by the very texts that attempt to limit them (379).

To a certain extent, *The Tragedy of Mariam* can be read as the victim of its own genre. Its subversive discourse is predictably contained by the very virtue of being a tragedy: a genre that has always articulated the masculine and the established. Cary's capitulation to the exegeses of the tragic has undoubtedly impeded any

possible feminist discourse. Mariam's apparent subversion ends up a consolidation of the *status quo*. In this, *The Tragedy of Mariam* echoes perfectly Stephen Greenblatt's take on the ultimate ideological function of literature. “Thus the subversiveness, which is genuine and radical, sufficiently disturbing so that to be suspected of such beliefs,” Greenblatt eloquently phrases it, “could lead to imprisonment and torture, is at the same time contained by the power it would appear to threaten. Indeed the subversiveness is the very product of that power and furthers its ends” (26). If seen under the lenses of Greenblatt, *The Tragedy of Mariam*, therefore, can be read as a text that subverts the patriarchal and tyrannical discourses of Renaissance England. This subversion is, however, subtly contained by the generic qualities of tragedy, among which *hamartia* has been very effective in the case of Mariam, not least because it leads to her tragic death, which in turn, can be politically interpreted as her ultimate containment and the consolidation of the *status quo*.

Approached from another perspective, however, the tragedy as a genre gives Mariam an experimental space for subversion and negotiation of patriarchal and tyrannical culture. As pointed out earlier, tragedy is seen as the 'masculinist' genre that has always confined the tragic to male heroes. Cary's subversion of this Aristotelian doctrine augurs well for her subversive motifs behind writing this tragedy from the perspective of Mariam. It is a female manipulation of Aristotle's and a challenge to the historical confinement of the tragic to male heroes. According to Aristotle, although a woman and a slave might be “good”, they cannot be tragic heroes since as he tells us “Females are inferior and slaves are beneath consideration” (*Poetics* 20).

Being the first (known) English woman writer to publish a play, Cary, one may postulate, was positioned to write 'against the grain'. By dramatizing Mariam as a tragic heroine who, against the tradition, fully embodies the definition of Aristotle's tragic hero, Cary can be said to challenge the generic confinement of the 'high' tragic to males even if we recall heroines such as Antigone, Electra, and Medea. Cary appears to subtly celebrate the capability of a woman in being a tragic heroine competing dramatically and historically with such a tragic figure as Herod the Great. Not only may we perceive in Mariam's challenge of Herod a metafictional stance which subverts the male literary and generic establishment, but also an early modern female cultural resistance that puts Cary ahead of her time in adopting a feminist strategy of challenging patriarchy, known later as 'self-ownership.' Mariam, by refusing to capitulate to Herod, is declaring her self-ownership and refusing being owned by a husband and a king. “Self-Ownership,” Margit Stange asserts, “signified a wife's right to refuse marital sex— a right feminists were demanding as the key to female autonomy” (22). Cary's dramatization of a woman who used her body as a strategy of challenge and negotiation of power is a proof of the subversiveness of the play. It perhaps in this context that Lewalski's following quotation, however radical it may sound, might be justified:

Mariam is the last published in a series of Senecan closet dramas concerned with forms of tyranny, and should be seen perhaps as the first series of tragedies (1610-14) that focus on female resistance to tyrants in the domestic sphere—women who seek to control their own sexual choices, challenging the orthodox ideal of submission[...] Mariam's challenge to the patriarchal control within the institution of marriage is revolutionary, as the heroine claims a

wife's right to her own speech—public and private as well as the integrity of her emotional life and her own self-definition. (210)

Yet, it is particularly through another generic quality that one can radicalize *The Tragedy of Mariam*. This quality is the concept of *mimesis*, or as Aristotle defines it “the imitation of reality,” which is “the chief purpose of all composition” (3). Far from locating the reality of *The Tragedy of Mariam* in its Jewish factual and mythical narratives, one may argue that its ideological history or historiography is intrinsically related to Renaissance England. The figure of Herod transcends its mythological iconography to display mimetic patriarchy and monarchy. Herod can be projected through his authoritative double identity as patriarch and monarch in the very historical reality of the play. His patriarchy is a social reality that Cary injects from her personal experience. His tyranny is a political reality that she constructs through playing on the interrelation between the concept of history as a past and history as reality. The mimetic in *The Tragedy of Mariam* does transcend the historical and the mythical to dwell on the real.

Mimesis puts us in the actual and the historical, and its effect is actual and historical. The fear that Herod generates in us, displays our unconscious fear of tyranny and injustice, or, as Lewalski puts it: “In Cary’s *Mariam* political and domestic tyranny are feared in Herod the Great” (194). The love and sympathy we feel for Mariam is the culmination of a historical identification with the victims of injustice. *Mimesis* is the royal path to the cathartic, which in turn, makes us ponder on the likeliness that what happened to the tragic heroine could happen to us. The cathartic is the ultimate *telos* of the tragic. Through its focus on the didactic and the moral, catharsis can help us in locating the ideology of a given tragedy since it is through catharsis that the readers and audiences receive the message of the play. *Catharsis*, as such sets a link between the plight of the tragic hero and us. Not only do we pity a tragic hero like Hamlet, but we also become aware of the circumstances that led to his downfall. Our intellectual investigation of the power games taking place in the court of the play ends up, most of the times, with a historical investigation of the courts of our real play.

This is likely what most of us have experienced after reading *The Tragedy of Mariam*. Mariam’s downfall stimulates both our emotional and political *catharsis*. We identify with her, we pity her, and we fear that what happened to her can equally happen to us. The locus of our fear is Herod, both as a cruel husband and a ruthless monarch. It is through *catharsis* that *The Tragedy of Mariam* injects in us its socio-political message. It is through the cathartic that we may conjure up what Frederic Jameson has dubbed as the *foci* of the literary text, which is “the political unconscious”. The latter, as explained by Jameson, historicizes the literary text and transforms it into “a socially symbolic act” (20). *The Tragedy of Mariam*’s unconscious is Cary’s sublimation of her repressed “public voice” into a political silence to which the discerning political readers will give a voice.

Interestingly enough, if revisited from the perspective of the late Edward Said, one might argue that *The Tragedy of Mariam* can be read as an Orientalist text. By an Orientalist text, and as he argued in hugely influential *Orientalism: Western Concepts of the Orient*(1978) and, to a lesser degree, *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), Said has in mind, any western literary text that discursively constructs—wholly or partly, overtly or covertly—the Orientals(i.e., Muslims) as the West’s irreconcilably antagonistic Other. Among other things, Said defines

Orientalism, as a “collection of dreams, images, and vocabularies available to anyone who has tried to talk about what lies east of the dividing line.”(73). Said locates this constructed Orient in what was interchangeably known during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance as the lands of the Saracens, Moors, and Turks. In Said’s own words, “the term *Orient*,” is “most rigorously understood as applying to the Islamic Orient” (95). This concept or rather metaphor of the ‘Orient’, and since ancient times, has been fashioned and refashioned by western authors as *the land* of exoticism, materialism, tyranny, immorality, licentiousness, irrationality, misogyny and cruelty.

Although it is always legitimate to question the applicability of Said’s theory to the medieval and early modern encounters between the Islamic Orient and the West, especially when it is a fact that, and in great part the Orient was conquering not conquered, Said’s strong argument that the West, in its search for self-definition, have constructed Muslims as the ultimate Other *par excellence*—exotic, lustful, carnal, cruel, cunning, irrational, and emotional—is still valid with those interested in exploring what they consider as medieval and early modern discourses of Orientalism. *The Tragedy of Mariam*, I will argue, is not an exception.

It is common place that *The Tragedy of Mariam* based on the account of the Queen Mariam by her husband King Herod chronicled by Josephus’ *Antiquities of the Jews* and *The Wars of the Jews*. Set in the very heart of the Orient, that is Palestine, the play, geographically and ideologically, transports us to the single most contested “contact zone,”(6) to use Mary Louise Pratt’s influential phrase, between the Christian West and the Islamic East. “There is good reason, then,” Dymna Callaghan notes, “not to dismiss the Palestine of Cary’s *Mariam* as a mere backdrop, as a matter of incidental local codes. Rather Palestine is the locus of complex racial and religious coordinates, at once the displaced center of Christianity and the home of the infidel” (168).

In order to fully grasp the discourses of alterity in *The Tragedy of Mariam*, it is essential to go beyond the overtly racialized focus on the Edomites (Herod/Salome) and settle on the covertly orientalist depiction of the Arabian Silleus.

We all know that the play presents Herod as an Idumean or Edomite. Edomites are a group of ‘Oriental’ people who used to live south of the Kingdom of Judea and who converted to Judaism. History mentions that despite their conversion, they were looked down by ‘pure’ Jews. This is nearly dramatized in *The Tragedy of Mariam* in the following lines by Alexandra, Mariam’s mother:

What means these tears? My Mariam doth mistake.
 The news we heard did tell the tyrant’s end:
 What weep’st thou for thy brother’s murd’rer’s sake?
 Will ever wight a tear for Herod spend?
 My curse pursue his breathless trunk and spirit,
 Base Edomite, the damnèd Esau’s heir.
 Must he ere Jacob’s child the crown inherit?
 Must he, vile wretch, be set in David’s chair?
 No, David’s soul, within the bosom placed
 Of our forefather Abram, was ashamed
 To see his seat with such a toad disgraced,
 That seat that hath by Judah’s race been famed.

Thou fatal enemy to royal blood. (I.2. 1-12, 53-54)

Like her mother, Mariam is fully aware of her racial 'superiority'. In a racially charged exchange with her sister-in-law Salome, she has this to say:

Scorn those that are for thy companions held.
 Though I thy brother's face had never seen,
 My birth thy baser birth so far excelled,
 I had to both of you the princess been.
 Thou parti-Jew, and parti-Edomite,
 Thou mongrel: issued from rejected race,
 Thy ancestors against the Heavens did fight,
 And thou like them wilt heavenly birth disgrace. (I.3. 25-32, 59)

As noted by Barry Weller, for early modern English readers, the ethnically Edomite and religiously Jew Herod, is the epitome of villainy (19). The fear he must have engendered is related not only to his tyranny, cruel, and 'impure' race, but also from the doubt surrounding his real commitment to the Jewish faith. "Although Herod usually observed Jewish law in public," Weller maintains, "many observers clearly regarded him as a monster, as suggested by an Augustan epigram: "It was better to be Herod's swine than a son of Herod" (19). Perhaps one is not going too far to suggest that there is something of a Saracen/Moorish connection in this oriental monster!

This can be corroborated by bringing the attention to the fact that in medieval literature, Herod was sometimes referred to as pseudo-Muslim. This is clearly dramatized, for instance, in two famous medieval *Corpus Christi* plays. The first one is *Herod the Great*, where Herod is depicted as a "hynd king -by the grace of Mahowne- of Jury" (*Medieval Drama*, 438) and who swears often by "Mahowne," one of the numerous medieval misspellings of Muhammad. The second is *The Death of Herod*, where again Herod is depicted as a pseudo-Muslim ruthless tyrant who invokes usually "the gracious Mahound" (*Medieval Drama*, 457), yet another medieval misspelling of Muhammad.⁴

Tellingly, even in some modern western accounts, Herod is presented as an Arab. This is the case in numerous Internet sites where, among other things, Herod is described as "[although] a practicing Jew, of Arab origin on both sides." Some films are not an exception. In fact, as mentioned by Jack G. Shaheen in his

⁴As shown by a number of scholars, if one surveys much of the literature of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, one might easily discern the abundant presence of the Saracens, Moors, Turks, and Mohammedans in European literature. The Muslim Other, as Dorothee Metlitzki once phrased it, became "a crucial public theme," that permeated the religious, political, military and social life of Christian Europe, as well as its literary and cultural products (116). For more on this, see, among many others, Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West: the Making of an Image* (1960), *The Arabs and Medieval Europe* (1975), Richard Southern, *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages* (1962), Marie-Therese d'Alverny, *La connaissance de l'Islam dans l'Occident médiéval* (1994), Michael Frassetto and David R. Blanks, *Western Views of Islam in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (1999), John V. Tolan's *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination* (2002), Emily C. Bartels, *Speaking of the Moor: From Alcazar to Othello* (2008), and Adam Galamaga, *Representations of Islam in Travel Literature in Early Modern England* (2011).

Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People (2009), movies such as “The King of Kings” (1961), and to quote Shaheen, “the narrator (Orson Welles) falsely states the Roman- appointed leader who slaughters the movies Jews, Herod the Great, was an “Arab.”(303).

Aside from what might be seen as a possible racial and religious transfiguration of Herod, the textual references to the Arabian Silleus can be a rich site for revisiting the play's orientalist discourse. It is surprising that little, if nothing, has been said about the racialized representation of Silleus in *The Tragedy of Mariam* in most studies that have discussed race in the writings of early modern women in general and Cary's play in particular. To give some examples, in Kim F. Hall's “Beauty and the Beast of Whiteness: Teaching Race and Gender”-- which explores the teaching of *The Tragedy of Mariam*, *Othello*, and *Oronooko*-- and Dymna Callaghan's foundational study “ Re-Reading Elizabeth Cary's *The Tragedie of Mariam, Fair Queene of Jewry*”, Silleus is not referred to even in passing. This holds true even, although to a lesser degree, for Kimberly Woolsey Poitevin's, “Counterfeit Colour': Making Up Race in Elizabeth Cary's *The Tragedy of Mariam*.”, where despite some references to the Moors in medieval and Early modern western literature and the legality of divorce in Islamic law, her entire focus falls on the racial and religious juxtaposition of Mariam and Salome especially in what relates to the dominant debate of (Christian) whiteness versus (Jewish) blackness. The fact is that Silleus is mentioned only once-- as Salome's lover-- in her entire article.⁵

It is an inescapable fact that Silleus is another figure of those “horrible Peple,” to *Morte D'Arthur*, (117) and another “erring barbarian,” *Ohello*, (3.3.206-7) who literally and symbolically populate western literature of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. *The Tragedy of Mariam*, one might say, provides us with another 'horrible and 'erring' Arabian among those 'base' *gente* who populate the “Orient.” Constabarus' infuriation at his wife does not seem to emanate solely from his excruciating feeling of matrimonial betrayal. It is predominantly racial and he has no secret about the fact that he is most and foremost concerned by the fact that his wife's eyes have fallen on a 'base' Arabian:

Oh Salome, how much you wrong your name
Your race, your country, and your husband most.
A stranger's private conference is shame
I blush for you that have your blushing lost
Oft have I found, and found you to my grief
Consorted with this base Arabian here.
Heaven knows that you have been my comfort chief,
Then do not now my greater plague appear. (I.6.1-6, 64-65)

Constabarus, as a Jewish husband is undoubtedly concerned about his conjugal honor. Yet, his “greater plague” is caused by the fact that his wife has given him up, he who is a pure Jew, for the sake of an Arabian, the '*gentile*' par excellence.

⁵The same is even true of Ferguson, *Dido's Daughters: Literacy, Gender, and Empire in Early Modern England and France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), where she mentions Silleus a couple of times as being Salome's lover without exploring his racialized representation.

What is significant here is that Constabarus' stereotyping of Silleus does not solely capture Jewish views of Ismaelites (Saracens), but it also, and perhaps more importantly, it betrays images and discourses amounting to Renaissance Jewish Orientalism. By degrading a fellow Semite and Oriental, Constabarus is indirectly degrading himself. While this goes beyond the scope of the current article, it would be particularly interesting to approach *The Tragedy of Mariam* from the perspective of works such as *Orientalism And The Jews* (2005), not the least in relation to Suzane Conklin Akbari's claim that the medieval and early modern western representation of Saracens/Moors were largely, if not wholly, modeled on accounts of Biblical Jews (33):

To go back to our text, there is no reason not to believe that the Arabian Silleus is the primary target of the play's racial stereotypes. Silleus' seductiveness, for example, is depicted through a sensual diction full of images of fire which, as attested below, conjure up conventional temptation scenes of morality drama:

My coals of love to quench: for through they smother
The flames awhile, yet will they out at last.
Oh! Blessed Arabia, in best climate placed.
I by The fruit will censure of the tree.
Tis not in vain, thou happy name thou hast
If all Arabians like Silleus be.
Had not my fate been too, too contrary,
When I on Constabarus first did gaze.
Silleus had been object to mine eye,
whose looks and personage must all eyes amaze. (1.4.7-16, 60)

By most accounts, the figure of Silleus as an exotic male seducer brings to one's mind Jill Dubisch's fascinating investigation of Sex and Orientalism in her essay "Lovers in the Field: Sex, Dominance and the Female Anthropologist," notably her theory of the inherent correlation between the exotic and erotic in western Orientalist writing (33). As a rare early modern female text *The Tragedy of Mariam* does equally, and perhaps most importantly, corroborate Dubisch's insightful following comment:

Less frequently portrayed or examined, however, is the sexual [oriental] male Other. When he is portrayed, such portrayal often reveals the threatening dimension of erotic sexuality which Said mentions—for example this insatiable and in-exhaustible Oriental potentate with his harem of wives and concubines (33).

It seems that Silleus is an early modern personification of this "insatiable and in-exhaustible Oriental potentate" and one can always imagine Salome among his *harem of wives and concubines!*

On another note, it does not take much effort to discern the near equation of Silleus to Othello. With his "foul charms" (*Othello*, 1.2.73), he has mesmerized Salome and he allured with all material promises. Literally and figuratively, when Silleus is given a voice, his is one full of Oriental excess:

Arabia, joy, prepare thy earth with green,
Thou never happy wert indeed till now:
Now shall thy ground be trod by beauty's queen,

Her foot is destined to depress thy brow.
 Thou shalt, fair Salome, command as much
 As if the royal ornament were thine. (I.5.34-39, 63)

Again, like Desdemona who was enchanted by Othello's exotic language and sexuality—black magic in Iago's eyes—Salome seems to be the prey of the Arabian flattening words:

Well found, fair Salome, Judea's pride!
 Hath they innated wisdom found the way
 To make Silleus deem him deified,
 By gaining thee, a more than precious prey? (I.5. 1-5, 63)

Salome, who is both looked down by her sister-in-law and her husband—emotionally and sexually—has found all “allowances” in Silleus. The latter's allowances are impliedly both emotional and sexual. Here is the enchanting language of Silleus:

Thinks Salome, Silleus hath a tongue
 To censure her fair actions? Let my blood
 Bedash my proper brow, for such a wrong,
 The being yours, can make even vices good. (I.5. 17-20, 63)

Concomitantly, Arabia, land of heat and lust, while at least impliedly, a pure hell for Mariam and her likes, in her foil's scopophilic eyes looms as an earthly paradise. In her “task” of pursuing of her own desires, Salome is ready to everything immoral and evil to get what she wants. There is perhaps no more egregious example of this than when she satanically urge her brother Pheroras to help her plot the execution of her husband:

Tis not so hard a task. It is no more
 But tell the King that Constabarus hid
 The sons of Babas, done to death before;
 And 'tis no more than Constabarus did.
 And tell him more, that we, for Herod's sake,
 Not able to endure our brother's foe,
 Did with a bill out separation make,
 Though loath from Constabarus else to go. (III.2.37-44, 88)

Be this as it may, it is understood that Palestine is not the place for a promiscuous woman like Salome. Holy Palestine is the place for Mariam, the very embodiment of morality, chastity and purity. Salome can gratify her “coals of love,” only in an 'unholy' *loci* that befits her. A “blessed Arabia,” which, according to Salome, is in “best climate placed”. Arabia, one of the hottest countries in the world seems to climatically and morally fit Salome, dubbed by Catherine Belsey as “a wicked woman, spiritual sister of Vittoria and Lady Macbeth” (174).⁶ One has to remember here the 'noble' motivations that

⁶I am indebted to Kimiko Yoshida for this pertinent quotation.

encouraged Mariam to question her relationship with her husband and compare them to those behind Salome's revolt against Constabarus. In other words, if the evil Salome figures as the imperfect foil of the good Mariam, Silleus is her perfect match!

The juxtaposition of Palestine and Arabia echoes Medieval and Renaissance orientalist discourses in as much as the denigration of the Arabian in *The Tragedy of Mariam* translates the racial hierarchy of Renaissance England. Written by a stalwart Christian—as evidenced from the hagiography written by her daughter—the text internalizes the religious manipulation of race. In this hierarchy, we might infer the supremacy of Mariam, who is unconsciously represented not only as the pure white queen, but also as a metaphor of a Christian heroine. The question that enforces itself here is the following: how could such a young Christian stalwart-, which Cary really was, - write about Mariam (Mary in Hebrew and Arabic) without injecting her veneration to Mary, without injecting her prejudices against both Jews-the presumed oppressors of Jesus- and the Arabs- the “infidels” and the conquerors of the Holy Land? As a religiously knowing subject, Cary unconsciously injects her religious knowledge and subjectivity in her play.

One may argue that in early modern England, both Jews and Arabs are both “others”, *but some others as more others than others*. Due to mostly biblical narratives, Jews are ultimately more acceptable than Arabs/Muslims. In fact, in *The Tragedy of Mariam* one can easily trace racial/religious hierarchy, not least because of the literal and figurative placing of the Arabian Silleus at the very bottom. Silleus is depicted as the ultimate source of moral decadence. His appearance entices Salome to rebel against the Jewish laws of marriage and sexuality. In several respects, and if Salome is a “base woman”, in Mariam's eyes, in the minds of early modern readers the Arabian Silleus would be ‘the base of the bases!’

To sum up, at least when it comes to its “cultural work,” *The Tragedy of Mariam, The Fair Queene of Jewry*, defies an ultimate evaluation. On one hand, it can certainly be read as a subversive text that targets Renaissance patriarchy and monarchy. Conversely, its racialized representation of the Other(s) and the Arabians in particular can be read as an overt/covert consolidation of (dominant) early modern discourses of Orientalism, which in turn, testifies to the fact that the first (known) play to be published by an English woman should be approached as discursively very complex, if not ambivalent.

References

- Aristotle. 1998. *Poetics*. Kenneth McLeish (Trans.). New York: Theater Communications Group.
- Bayoumi, Moustafa and Andrew Rubin (eds). 2000. *The Edward Said Reader*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Belsey, Catherine. 1985. *The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama*. London: Methuen.
- Bevington, David (Ed.). 1975. *Medieval Drama*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Callaghan, Dympna. 1994. Re-Reading Elizabeth Cary's *The Tragedie of Mariam, Faire Queene of Jewry Women*. Pp. 163-177 In Margo Hendricks and Patricia Parker (eds.), *Race' and Writing in the English Modern Period*. London: Routledge.
- Cary, Elizabeth. 2000. *The Tragedy of Mariam, the Fair Queen of Jewry*. Stephanie Hodgson-Wright (Ed.). Peterborough: Broadview Press.

- Chan, Wing-tsit. 1970. The Ch'eng-Chu School of Early Ming. Pp 29-51 In William Theodore de Bary (eds.), *Self and Society in Ming Thought*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Cixous, Hélène. 1994. *The Hélène Cixous Reader*. Susan Sellers (Ed.). London: Routledge.
- Colie, Rosalie L. 1973. *The Resources of Kind: Genre, Theory in the Renaissance*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Dorothee, Metlitzki. 1977. *The Matter of Araby in Medieval England*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Durkheim, Emile. 1966. *The Rules of Sociological Method*, trans. S. A. Solovay and J. H. Mueller. New York: The Free Press.
- Ferguson, Margaret W. 1991. The Spectre of Resistance: The Tragedy of Mariam. Pp. 235-50 In David Scott Kastan and Peter Stallybrass (eds.), *Staging the Renaissance: Reinterpretations of Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama*. New York: Routledge.
- Frederic Jameson. 1981. *Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. New York: Cornell University Press.
- Habermann, Ina. 2003. *Staging Slander and Gender in Early Modern England*. Aldershot, England: Ashgate.
- Hamlin, William. 2003. Elizabeth Cary's Mariam and the Critique of Pure Reason. *Early Modern Literary Studies*, 9 : <URL: <http://purl.oclc.org/emls/09-1/hamlcary.html>>.
- Hall, Kim F. 1996. Beauty and the Beast of Whiteness: Teaching Race and Gender. *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 47, 461-475.
- Green, Reina 2003. *Ears Prejudicate in Mariam and Duchess of Malfi*. *Studies in English Literature*, 43, 459-474.
- Greenblatt, Stephen. 1985. Invisible Bullets: Renaissance Authority and Its Subversion-*Henry IV & V*. Pp. 18-47 In Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (eds.), *Political Shakespeare- New Essays in Cultural Materialism*. New York: Cornell University Press.
- Lewalski, Barbara Kiefer. 1998. Resisting Tyrants. Pp. 194-218 In S. P. Cerasano and Mario Wynne-Davies (eds.), *Readings in Renaissance Women's Drama*. London: Routledge.
- . 1991. Running On with Almost Public Voice: The Case of “E.C.” Pp. 37-67 In Florence Howe (ed.), *Tradition and the Talents of Women*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Nesler, Miranda Garno. 2012. Closeted Authority in *The Tragedy of Mariam*. *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 52, 363-379.
- Weller, Barry. 1994. Introduction. Pp. 1-59 In Barry Weller and Margaret W. Ferguson (eds.), *The Tragedy of Mariam, the Fair Queen of Jewry*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Poitevin, Kimberly Woolsey. 2005. 'Counterfeit Colour': Making Up Race in Elizabeth Cary's *The Tragedy of Mariam*. *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 24, 13-34.
- Rawls, John. 1958. Justice as Fairness. *Philosophical Review*, 67, 164-94.
- Russell, Bertrand. 1922. *The Problem of China*. London: George Allen & Unwin.
- Said, Edward. 1978. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Shakespeare, William. 1997. *Othello*. Harold Bloom (ed.). New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987.
- Stange, Margit. 1998. *Personal Property: Wives, White Slaves, and the Market in Women*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Tompkins, Jane. 1985. *Sentimental Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790–1860*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Vinaver, Eugene. 1971. *Malory Complete Works*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Yoshida, Kimiko. 2005. Divorce in Elizabeth Cary, *The Tragedy of Mariam*. *Reading*, 26, 33-47.