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Erasure of the Individual Sovereign: The Vulnerability of Public and Gendered Identity in Marlowe, Webster, and Cary

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ERASURE OF THE INDIVIDUAL SOVEREIGN: THE VULNERABILITY OF
PUBLIC AND GENDERED IDENTITY IN MARLOWE, WEBSTER, AND CARY

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The Graduate School of
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In Partial Fulfillment of the
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English

By
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Accepted by:
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ABSTRACT

My thesis explores the isolation and fragmentation that attend ruling ideologies in early modern England. I study three plays, Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II*, John Webster's *Duchess of Malfi*, and Elizabeth Cary's *Tragedy of Mariam*, in order to examine the illusion of absolute power they represent. Utilizing Ernst Kantorowicz's concept of the "king's two bodies," I explore ways in which the sovereign ideal dehumanizes monarch and subjects, depriving them both of autonomy and personal connection. Those who attempt to break free from its constraints find themselves rewritten as dangerous to the realm. Because it depends on naturalized hierarchies of difference, the performance of order necessitates the expulsion of potential deviation. I therefore demonstrate the inability of the patriarchal subject to incorporate private identity, which could allow an unstable element into the designation of gender and status. Moreover, I examine the irony that the attempts to shut down such instability generate more of it. Through this analysis, I address how the three playwrights critique their present ruling systems. They comment on a defective structure, as patriarchal imperatives transform absolute rule into a performance devoid of meaning. The tyrannical figures play on early modern anxieties regarding a sovereign's abuse of his/her power. I analyze the representations of Elizabeth I and James I against such theatrical images. Elizabeth encapsulates the hope for new ways of relation, but James indicates the public and private exclusions necessary to maintain a desired social performance.

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INTRODUCTION

Central to this thesis is the figure of the divided sovereign. Throughout, I will analyze isolation and fragmentation within early modern hierarchal systems. Thus, it is fitting to begin with Ernst Kantorowicz and the medieval concepts of rule recorded in his work *The King's Two Bodies*. This ideal transcends its subjects, associating the monarchical system and its ruler with divine right. As a result, the sovereign transforms into a figurehead that represents the collective identity of the people. Laying the basis for interactions between sovereign and subjects, the implications of this theory affect the social hierarchy as a whole. It combines the monarch with his/her kingdom, creating an entity with no claim to a private self-definition. Kantorowicz addresses the compulsion that sets the monarch apart from his subjects. He states, "The migration of the 'Soul,' that is, the immortal part of kingship, from one incarnation to another as expressed by the concept of the king's demise is certainly one of the essentials of the whole theory of the King's Two Bodies" (13). However, this theory fails to assure protection against itself, as it depends on the dehumanization and alienation of its participants. In this system, the monarch must incorporate within him/herself the desires of the people. The sovereign must conversely take on the role of the body politic's reigning head, which entails the stripping away of the ruler's personal desires in order to accommodate the realm. Accordingly, Kantorowicz stresses the confusion inherent to the "fiction of the royal superbody" (46). Both ruler and subjects find themselves acting within a system that enforces a monarch's vulnerability to influence. Though unable to perceive his/her subject position within the performance of power, the monarch may be shaped into a

threat to social order. The King's failure to take on a superhuman role, one that transcends the body, necessitates containment. The sovereign is by definition always weaker than he should be.

Taking into account the social compulsion to exorcise such weakness, this thesis analyzes the impossibility of autonomous existence for early modern sovereigns and their subjects. I explore three plays, Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II*, John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*, and Elizabeth Cary's *The Tragedy of Mariam*, in order to evaluate threats to gender and subject identity that attend ideologies of early modern rule. The pressure to enforce public roles over private promotes a generalized desexualization, while ironically re-sexualizing the actors in destructive ways. Judith Butler's theory of performative gender serves as a starting point, for it is from her refutation of a fixed self that the analysis begins dissecting the impetus to contain identity. Against the concept of innate behavioral patterns, Butler states that "acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause" (185). Depending on hierarchies of difference, whether by gender or by status, the monarchal ideal must come across as the kingdom's natural and preferred state of being. However, the sovereign system is a defective performance of rule, unable to sustain itself due to an inevitable loss of meaning. Unable to incorporate private identity, it necessitates isolation from the relations that fulfill self-definition. Subjects and sovereign exist locked in a performance that deprives them of the ability to act, their limited awareness of themselves and each other barring them from achieving autonomy.

Thus, they uphold a performative reality that allows them a semblance of authority. Due to the constant reinstatement of hierarchal differences onto subjects and sovereign, the naturalized system destabilizes and rewrites those who choose to challenge its order. Through analysis of the three plays and of monarchal representations, I discuss how the authors critique the given order and expose its failure to function effectively.

Along with utilizing Butler and Kantorowicz, I add to existing research on the sovereign subject and early modern subjectivity. Laurie Shannon's work on sovereignty and friendship provides one of the basic premises from which this study began, but this thesis diverges from her theory in that the alienation I address extends beyond the monarch and female subjects. For the purposes of my study, "friendship" is, in effect, an impossible ideal. Disqualifying women and rulers, "the rhetoric of male friendship represents a powerful vision of an unsubordinated selfhood" (61). Shannon's theory depends on the ability to attain a "private sovereignty" (57), or rather a measure of autonomy that guarantees a person the control to forge a mutually beneficial union. However, the fragmentary beings that emerge from absolute sovereignty lack the self awareness necessary to secure homosocial bonds. In their critiques against the system in place, the playwrights associate absolutism, as well as the patriarchal ideal behind it, with the loss of identity. The sovereign's detached and disjointed self reflects back onto the realm, subjecting each person to his shaping influence. As their patriarchal representative, the monarch curtails rebellion by promoting a performance in which each subject defines his/her self in relation to the ruler. Yet neither subject nor sovereign may bridge the comprehensive gap between them, unable to perceive each other outside of the limited

scope of hierarchal difference. For the early modern systems in place, friendship bonds between men signify the threat of social diversion through an explicit marginalization of the monarch's role. The sovereign ideal's mutual dependence between subject and sovereign becomes unbalanced, and the ability to rule threatens to shift outside of divine decree. On the other hand, Rebecca Bushnell addresses anxieties over the absolute tyrant, for monarchs as a whole "implied the disintegration of the body politic with the vulnerability of the king's natural body" (39). The tyrant holds the potential to impose his irrational passions onto his people. Bushnell argues that "overwhelming and unquenchable appetites that possess the tyrant motivate his actions; these appetites lead him in the end to seek the political power that enables him to satisfy his appetites without hindrance by the law. It is appetite, and not power, in the end, that topples the hierarchy of reason, converting man into beast" (53). Each of the dramas studied for this thesis utilizes an absolutist figure/s that manifests social fears of a changeable reign. The desire to satisfy or reaffirm the private self, for all characters, proves dangerous to the existing order. Because sovereignty depends on relegating all subjects to an existence that denies them a common humanity, a malleable ruling structure will inevitably expose the fragility of claiming power through status, position, and gender.

The self-representations of Elizabeth I and James I frame my analysis of the plays. Both monarchs struggled to control and construct images invulnerable to personal influence; however, they subscribed to a means of power that invariably weakened their representations. Their manipulation of the mechanisms securing position revealed a network that can be rewritten, changed, and enforced with the unpredictable whims of the

people in power. The patriarchal absolutist monarch James expounded on his position as the head of the body politic. Separated from the governed by divine right, he ruled from God's "Throne" (*Basilikon Doron* 2) and relied on a prescription of kingship that presented him "as a closed and masculine system" (Ives and Parkinson 117). Due to the space inscribed for James alone, anxieties arose over the potential for conflating the body politic with the sovereign's unchecked desires. James implied a self-consuming system, in which the self susceptible to private emotions governs without censure. Such ruling practices generated fear in the shape of the preexisting figure of the tyrannical sovereign. Shannon writes, "The exercise of a king's private will, unsubordinated to the good of the realm, 'unkings' the king; indeed, it locates him within one of the worst Renaissance categories of moral failure: tyranny" (154). The use of tyranny plays heavily within this thesis, for the playwrights depict abuses of power in order to challenge an oppressive structure. Cary and Webster, specifically, address the effects of insulating a corrupt tyrant: the moral and social inversion of both family and body politic.

In contrast to the Jacobean tyrant, Elizabeth presented a less restrictive regime, as she could not fulfill the expected role of the patriarchal ruler. Aware that her sex made her vulnerable to accusations of weakness, she crafted a position that made her femininity an advantage. She both sexualized her female body and exploited the ideal of the chaste woman. She enacted and withheld passion, in defiance of the pressure to relegate her to a single gendered body. as the virgin queen, her "self-representation...managed to give her subjects what they had requested – the affirmation of her 'virtue' – but by redefining the passive, female virtue in terms that located her outside the associated structure of

marriage and male control” (Frye 15). Unlike the emasculated version of herself that Marlowe renders in the character of Edward II, Elizabeth managed to achieve a medium between preconceived gendered roles. She utilized a multi-gendered image that encapsulated and enforced her right to action. When placed against the contexts of the plays, Elizabeth suggests an alternative form of reign.

Through Elizabeth’s example, this thesis exposes the patriarchal sovereign’s disassociation from his own body and those of his subjects. Unable to accommodate feminized elements of self construction, the theatrical enforcers of social stability transgress against the kingdom or realm they attempt to preserve. They struggle to uphold a structure incapable of acknowledging a woman’s desire above “use value” (Irigaray 31) or a king’s yearning to disassociate from the “body politic” (Bredbeck 132). The characters who step forward to “mend” (Marlowe 4.257) kingdom, bloodline, or self fail to reconcile their political selves with potential subservience to a passionate, and therefore dangerous, being. The characters who strive to reinstate their perceptions of social order depend on the ability to contain otherness within a marginalized subject. Figures such as Ferdinand and Herod rely on gendered norms to affirm their superiority, and yet they cannot acknowledge the dehumanizing effects of adhering to this social structure. Instead, when unable to keep up the fiction of self-governing ruler of household or self, the enforcers of social stability react against the isolated figure onto which they prescribe culpability. Adherence to such false binaries induces retaliation over the failure or refusal to perform expected gendered or sovereign roles. Elizabeth’s gendered ambiguity, however, allowed her to challenge such restrictions.

The first chapter of this thesis explores how the ideal of the body politic cannot integrate personal desire. As Marlowe's king attempts to incorporate his private yearning for a complete self through companionship, his alteration of the patriarchal model threatens to collapse the sovereign structure. Edward operates under the assumption of absolute control, blinded by his superior position as the kingdom's head. In contrast, the reigning queen at the time of the play's conception acted as a comparative reminder of a conscious ruler. Under constant acknowledgment of her gendered vulnerability, Elizabeth took care not to craft herself as a tyrant. She rejected strict adherence to the patriarchal model, while the theatrical Edward falls victim to the limitations attendant to the sovereign ideal. Because the acting structure possesses few ways to integrate emotion, Edward's dissenting nobles identify his desire for friendship as transgressive and corrupt. Moreover, he attempts to rewrite his combined personal and political role in order to incorporate a socially inferior companion. He asks Gaveston, "Why shouldst thou kneel? Knowest thou who I am? / Thy friend, thy self, another Gaveston?" (1.141-2). Already locked in a marriage beyond the physical, or rather naturally intertwined with the realm and its people, Edward's relationships with men threaten to undercut the idealized nature of the body politic. The power guaranteed Gaveston through his monarch's favoritism could unbalance the reigning hierarchy, in a way that reflects Elizabeth's impetus to marry. Her continued refusal to marry withheld for a time the country's fear over another's imposition onto the realm, as a husband may insist on her subjugation. Instead of challenging the sovereign system, and exposing it as open to manipulation, Elizabeth

transformed her combined self into her performance of rule. She subverted the structure, ensuring herself and her subjects a more flexible means of securing right to power.

Reflecting on James I's absolutist reign, *The Duchess of Malfi* locates the foundation of tyranny within the family and its hierarchy of patriarchal rule. Chapter two addresses Webster's utilization of distorted family dynamics, focusing on the inability of absolutism to contain tyranny and accommodate difference. The Duchess also attempts to carve out a position of personal fulfillment with another; nonetheless, she recognizes the need to rule detached from private desires. The resulting tyranny she faces displays in its extremity and irrationality the play's criticism of patriarchal power, which depends on the otherness of its subjects. Attempting to appropriate female sexuality in the figure of their sister, the brothers violate the doubled ruling body contained within the "king's two bodies." By seeking to consume her self, the brothers presume the right to impose their disorderly desires upon the realm's regent. They reflect James' advice on marriage: "Treate here as your owne flesh, commaund her as her Lord" (*Basilikon Doron* 60-61). Moreover, these instructions shaped his rhetoric of rule (43). In Webster's play, uncontrollable passions warp these ideas and indicate the ease with which an unstable tyrant may pervert the body politic. Not only does Ferdinand's obsession with his sister's sexuality border on the incestuous, but the violence exhibited by both brothers acts an indictment of absolutism's violation of the subject. Their actual positions within the sovereign structure further confuse their right to hold power over the Duchess. Relying on patriarchal superiority to justify their actions, the brothers nevertheless fail to recognize that their authority rests on their sister's complicity. However, once she proves

her unwillingness to “Be cased up like a holy relic” (Webster 3.2.137), she exposes the deception on which they base their power and self-definition. Unable to accept an autonomous female in control of her personal sexuality and political power, the brothers must somehow rectify the weaknesses of the gendered structure that shapes their perceptions of the social world. Ferdinand finds himself driven to kill a part of himself, and, as a result, he can no longer balance the binary attributes interwoven with his concept of the Duchess and his own personal identity. He goes mad and wrestles shadows (5.2.33), unable to recognize the fractured tyrant left in her absence. His fragmentation displays the tragedy, on both sides of the gender line, of suppressing the female to the point of casting her as separate from human.

In the chapter on *The Tragedy of Mariam*, I return to the impassioned monarch and focus on the deceptions that uphold an illusion of power. The more Herod insists on his patriarchal role, the more he exposes himself as the pawn of socially constructed images and people beyond his control. Predetermined practices of misogyny fashion a tyrant and distort both family and realm, as Herod reacts against the fear of unconstrained female sexuality and an alternative order. He assumes the ability to redefine his subjects and self, in a practice that mirrors the reality James depended on to assert his ruling right. Herod assumes that his wife will fulfill a detached ideal that denies her claim over herself and her relations. Shifting his gaze onto the people, he extends this framework and punishes those who fail to shape their selves to fit his expectation. Herod claims as his own the judgments of others, though only those that affirm his private suspicions. Turning away from the marginalized voice, he threatens to relegate the realm to an

effeminized displacement and projection of his vulnerable state. He depends on an overall adherence to representations that obscure weakness (Shannon 65), as the mere possibility of his wife's sexual deviancy unravels the structure upon which he constructs his identity. By seeking to preserve her body and self, Mariam defies the marginalization necessary for patriarchy to succeed. Additionally, her death establishes the inability for a moral figure synonymous with the Virgin Queen to exist within the gendered confines of marriage. Absolutism distorts the acknowledged subject self to the point that he/she must either deceive oneself through false performance or face the charge of betraying country and king.

Highly conscious of the interwoven nature of a single relative identity, all three plays feature sovereign characters who fall victim to the political and social system which they ostensibly control. As these characters attempt to construct fulfilling relationships, they transgress against ideologies that suppress private desires. Instead, characters face the imperative to concede to demands shaped by a destructive ideal of social and political order. This thesis explores the sovereign representation that hinges on performative otherness, which necessitates alienation in order to secure an illusive authority. Ruling ideology fails to accommodate a human being's potential for chaotic action, and the implication surfaces that calls for an alternative form of reign. The playwrights may write limited by preexisting perceptions, but they nevertheless challenge the ruling structure. Their works reflect on a paradoxical system that degrades a subject's desires and self through the very means intended to construct and preserve them.

CHAPTER ONE

THE FAILURE OF THE PATRIARCHAL SUBJECT IN CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE'S

EDWARD II

Edward II locates the passion for self-definition and fulfillment as the basis of political transgression. Christopher Marlowe's play doesn't hinge on prohibited infatuations, nor does it locate in sodomy and adultery the reasons for its tragedy. Instead, the work's turmoil rests on a conflation of desires that create imbalance within the kingdom's idealized social order. Even though Edward follows common practices of favoritism, he allows his preferences to destabilize the court hierarchy. *Edward II* is a play about the upsetting of the body politic, in which gender and status prove weakened indicators of social security. At the time of the play, Elizabeth's rule provided alternative ways of assimilating hierarchal difference as she maintained a more successful balancing act between the "king's two bodies." With her example serving as a contrast of careful sovereignty, Marlowe's play deprives its main character of his supports and thus illuminates the restraints necessary for the enactment of fair sovereignty. In this way, *Edward II* exposes the performance of power upon which the ideal of the body politic rests. A sovereign such as Elizabeth cannot reveal herself as separate from the body politic, and rather must actively participate in subsuming her self. When set against the play's main character, Elizabeth fits the mold of the necessary performer, precisely because she is already in the oxymoronic position of the female ruler. As such, she may shape her personal and public representation to take on an ambiguous identity. This ability separates her from the king depicted on stage, a figure so consumed by his

patriarchal role that he cannot perceive or accept the limitations placed on the sovereign ideal. Marlowe's play locates within Edward's assertion of masculine control the failure to recognize the representative flexibility necessary for rule. His assertion rather breaks down under the sovereign's subjection within the ruling system, revealing the lie of the absolute patriarch insulated from accusations of tyranny.

Paradoxically promoted and undermined, the patriarchal sovereign strains the ruling structure when he assumes a position protected from censure. Part of the play's tragic ending stems from Edward's inability to understand the anxiety generated by his favoritism. As the realm's patriarchal representative, he mistakes his position for one of unchecked power, and he threatens the nobles who disagree. From the play's beginning, he pits himself against them with statements such as: "[A]ll of them conspire to cross me thus; / But if I live, I'll tread upon their heads / That think with high looks thus to tread me down" (Marlowe 6.95-97). He lacks the ability to acknowledge that his position relies on their obedience, for Edward possesses a mental framework shaped by his appointed role as their collective embodiment. Consequently, he believes that the act of taking away his favor will deprive the dissenting nobles of authority. Edward cannot understand that their continued rebellion challenges his own right to reign. His attempts to alter the sovereign body, whether to include or displace subjects, reveal a changeable structure. Creating a fissure through which the nobles may replace their king, he inadvertently aids the nobles in turning the patriarchal model against him. Through Edward, Marlowe establishes the absolute ruler's potential to transform into a threat to the body politic, as the sovereign assumes the power to marginalize his subjects to the point that their

security rests on an irrational king's favor. On the other hand, always aware of her sex's expected subordination within the male/female bond, Elizabeth carefully crafted her representations so that she ruled as a vague threat to patriarchal order. She validated her authority by utilizing preexisting performances available to her, casting herself into such roles as the wife, mother, and king. By presenting herself as open to her subjects, while alternately a figure preserving her kingdom's virtue within her body, she could not easily be fashioned into a tyrant.

Rather than focusing on the destabilizing force of sodomitical passion, Marlowe emphasizes the struggle Edward undergoes to create an autonomous self. He creates a sympathetic figure through the king's own humanity. In this way, Marlowe presents desire and fallibility as the innate characteristics of a private identity. His title character's need for fulfilling companionship preserves even until the scene of his death, when Edward asks his executioner to "stay a while; forbear thy bloody hand" (25.75). As the nobles rewrite his desire for connection, Edward's vulnerability to the socially imposed classification of sodomy separates him from the isolated monarchal image. He is a victim, as well as King, and he faces death for his efforts to establish his individual identity. Unable to claim a complete self, Edward's downfall derives from the failure of the sovereign ideal to encompass the monarch's personal desires. Furthermore, in contrast to other depictions of Edward during his time, Marlowe displaces the sodomitical associations attendant to the myth of Sodom and Gomorrah. Claude Summers takes this divergence further by stating that "he [Marlowe] implicitly rebukes the religious and moral discourse about homosexuality in the Renaissance" (39). Instead,

Marlowe challenges the social inscription of the sodomite as the deviant other in opposition to ordered society. Not only does he strive “to demystify Elizabethan politics” (Callaghan 282), but he locates Edward outside of the “mythology of the unnatural, the alien, and the demonic” (Bredbeck 5). Rather than his sexuality, it is Edward’s exposure to inscription that brands him as a threat to the kingdom. Desiring private fulfillment, he cannot seamlessly merge with the intertwined personal and political image that characterizes the divine ruler. Edward’s role as an absolute patriarch necessitates the destruction of the connections that preserve his humanity, demanding that he conform to the performance of sovereign/subject alterity.

Marlowe’s refashioning of this historical king creates a play of ambiguity, with almost every character fighting to preserve his/her identity. Despite their efforts, they find the social structure that holds them in place crumbling under the human pressures of desire and ambition. The play starts with Edward calling his banished Gaveston home, an event that triggers the increasing dissatisfaction of nobles and church officials. In order to craft Gaveston as an equal companion, Edward attempts to incorporate his lover into the sovereign body by giving him titles and performing a shared reign. Accordingly, the nobles revolt against their king’s decisions and accuse Edward of weakening the realm. Because he disregards the hierarchy that guarantees their nobility, Edward seemingly invites the kingdom’s ruin. His blatant preference for a social inferior exposes the king as a mortal being largely swayed by his passions. Moreover, he neglects the expectation to act as husband to the queen, or rather to secure the propagation of the kingly bloodline, and drives Isabel towards the younger Mortimer, the greatest physical danger to his reign.

This fragmentation of Edward's ruling right allows Mortimer to take greater advantage of the power granted to him through his position alone. Inciting the nobles to revolt, Mortimer supplants Edward as king. Through imprisonment and mortification, Mortimer and Isabel attempt to degrade Edward to the extent that they deprive him of his sovereign status. After the king's murder, however, his son Edward III transforms into a more definitive king with his first acts of sentencing Mortimer to death and Isabel to prison.

At the center of the play's dilemma is an issue of consciousness, specifically in regards to acknowledging the paradoxical nature of the sovereign/subject relation, one that markedly contrasts Elizabeth's rule. Anxiety over the deployment of Elizabeth's private body infused reactions to her reign. While Edward displays a refusal to accept the political ramifications of favoritism, Elizabeth reigned with the conscious integration of the behaviors expected of a female sovereign. She was able to play upon, rather than act within, the categories of personal identity. By "assuming the assigned gendered roles of women, men, or both, or something in between" (Frye 13), Elizabeth enacted an ambiguous representation that rested entrapment within gendered stereotypes. As long as she limited access to her temporal body, relegating her sexuality to the political sphere, Elizabeth could remain a hybrid of her realm. She carried out a conceptual marriage to her country, in a merger that creates her as its complete representative. Presenting herself as a virgin ruler, she opted out of the social imperative to marry and, more importantly, to incorporate her identity with that of her husband. In order to preserve the isolation required to carry out the performance of a sexually incorruptible queen, Elizabeth had to retain the power to deny and shape overt advances upon her private body. When

challenged, the unmarried queen may therefore enforce her personal and political self with “representation as independent, forceful, semidivine, and magical – in short, attributes that placed her completely beyond the need for male protection...a necessary statement of her very real control of her court” (Frye 86). She obscured the charge of falling prey to the influence of others close to her, in which she would allow her passions, or someone else’s, to dictate the management of the country.¹ Instead, she transformed herself into the realm’s protector, through which the divine nature of kingship could continue to serve its realm. Edward, on the other hand, resists being shaped wholly by political necessity.

As the country’s subjects define their place in relation to the sovereign, they find themselves dependent upon their ruler’s inclination. An embodiment of the kingdom, the sovereign finds his/her private behavior transformed into political conduct. Accordingly, a ruler’s personal desires expose him/herself to an ideology that associates passionate companionship with the perversion of the realm. The image of the unmarried queen guaranteed “a large measure of actual autonomy, with ownership of her own body as the prelude to commanding her own subjects” (15). However, Elizabeth refused to relegate herself solely to the chaste woman, presenting herself also as a sexualized female and a male-gendered monarch. This crafting of a shifting gendered body allowed her to create distance between her and her subjects. She defied socially constructed roles, as a being beyond categorization and enforced by the divine right to rule. At strategic points during

¹ Curtis Perry argues that “the patronage of the Bedchamber can always be seen in multiple and contradictory ways: either in terms of the old-fashioned mode of personal generosity or as a corruption of administration in which personal intimacies encroach upon the public circulation of benefits and wealth” (1058)

her rule, she could be the mother of the realm, the wife married to the kingdom, or the prince who led the country into battle (Levin 144). Such performances allowed Elizabeth to wield her combined private and public desires to fit or divert social demand. The fictive Edward, on the other hand, reigns without any acknowledgment of his performative role. By committing himself to his “minions,” he opens his kingship to gendered categories that label his yearning for companionship a corruption of his patriarchal role. The traditional model the nobles uphold cannot incorporate the sovereign’s attempt at divided desires. Instead, their adherence to “the king’s two bodies” fuels the rebellion, as they utilize this concept to refashion the sovereign as the kingdom’s enemy. Thus, *Edward II* exhibits the anxiety incurred when subjects and rulers must act within a precarious hierarchy that always by necessity falls short of the ideal system of sovereignty.

The ideals of social order and the body politic rely on a performance of power that requires the elimination or political refashioning of personal desires. In serving his own need for connection, Edward becomes blind to the impact his emotional instability may have on the body politic. Due to his position as its representative, his detached focus on private desires threatens to shape the realm into a self-serving entity. His statement, “They love me not that hate my Gaveston” (6.37), casts his subjects as enemies of the king if they fail to incorporate a social inferior in Edward’s right to rule. Furthermore, Edward’s desire to include Gaveston within the sovereign subject reveals the transitory nature of power. As the king symbolically forges equal status with a person merely human, he provides Mortimer with the impetus to rebel against the patriarchal structure.

Edward actively distances himself from the indistinct space reserved for an eternal ideal of kingship. When Edward asserts himself as “Thy friend, thy self, another Gaveston” (1.14-2), he infuses his identity with a temporal passion. Such unchecked devotion to his favorite threatens to reshape the embodiment of the kingdom. Instead of gaining recognition for their loyalty, the “peers, whom thou [Edward] shouldst dearly love” (6.175) find their homosocial bonds with the king eclipsed by Edward’s relationship with Gaveston. This focused desire displaces the nobles from their powerful position as crucial supports to the king’s political body. The dissenting nobles therefore react against the transgressive passions they determine are dangerous to the realm, combating their own marginalization by positing Edward’s weaker, or rather human and private, desires as the “cause of all this wrack” (17.9). Like Gaveston, Edward’s private self is cast as incompatible with the body politic. Though Edward attempts to preserve his personal identity and desires from his dependence on noble favor, Edward nevertheless exposes his actions to their censure. Utilizing the rhetoric of “a captured sovereign – a sovereign subject(ed) to an interest directly at odds with his political purpose” (Shannon 127), the rebelling nobles justify isolating the king from his personal self and seek to deprive Edward of his ruling power. Though they cannot separate Edward from his sovereign status, or rather from the divine decree of kingship, the nobles possess enough play within the social structure to revolt against him. Marlowe suggests, however, that even as the nobility’s actions defend against tyranny, they can also create a climate of unrestrained ambition.

In the collision between ideology and humanity, a patriarch such as Edward defies submission to the kingly ideal; therefore, he presents a threat to the smooth continuation of the social structure. Yet if Edward submits to Mortimer's demands and banishes each "putrefying branch" (11.162), then he will negate his royal assertion of power. This paradox of rule leads to the sovereign's downfall, as Edward refuses to concede power to his nobles. Though supposedly the patriarch of his realm, he realizes near the end of the play the compulsion to either deny the aspects of his character outside of the sovereign image or take on the role shaped by the demands of his supporters. Mario DiGangi addresses the vulnerable nature of Edward's performance:

A wise and mighty monarch might use a favorite to display his power; in so doing, however, his power becomes partially dependent on his favorite's own power of display. Patronizing favorites sustains the king's power yet reveals that power to be based not in "absolute" right but in structures of political and economic interdependence. (110)

The inclusion of another person in the sovereign role reveals the early modern hierarchy as a mutable system. Such a hierarchy is neither essential nor innate, but rather created. However, the rebelling nobles cannot accept Edward's restructuring of the kingly model. The nobles may remain secure in serving an ideal, abstracted king, but the ruler's insistence on his humanity threatens their position. In an effort to break away from an inscriptive suppression, Edward attempts to bestow a measure of his power onto Gaveston. By doing so, Edward transforms Gaveston into an extension of his ruling right. Yet this endeavor fails to protect him against the men a sovereign depends upon to assert

his place within the kingdom. As Edward confers his identity to Gaveston, “it is neither sodomy nor class status that bother Mortimer, but rather Gaveston’s mastery of the techniques of self-display that ordinarily constitute authority” (Callaghan 285). Gaveston may gain power through enactment and little else, surpassing the nobles who achieve their place by a traditional allegiance to their king. Thus, Mortimer and the nobles react against Gaveston’s appropriation by seeking to undercut the personal inclinations that direct the king’s favor towards “base and obscure Gaveston” (1.100).

Against the backdrop of Elizabeth’s controversial rule, Marlowe’s work plays on the issue of status instability. His characters mirror the fear of an irrational sovereign’s reshaping of the hierarchies that secure each subject a position in the early modern social world. According to the introduction of *Feminist Readings of Early Modern Culture*, “the analogy of state to family effected the structural subordination of its subjects while it simultaneously imparted to (at least some of) them a measure of authority” (Traub, Kaplan, and Callaghan 3). A subject might thus take advantage of this small amount of power, subverting and recasting the patriarch as an ineffectual ruler. This ability undermines Edward’s capacity to act outside of a delimited position. When he asks, “Am I a king and must be overruled?” (1.134), Edward tries to enforce his self-image as a superior ruler. Without the compliance of both himself and his nobles, his performance can be exposed to the potential for failure or corruption. He must therefore act as part of a machine, incorporated within the realm even as he enacts the patriarchal role. The kingdom as a whole, as signified by the court nobles, depends on an unresisting subject that ensures its power of agency. Without a traditional king, the realm lacks a vessel

through which it may enforce its own identity as a definitive body. Edward may rule with the name of King, but he fails to realize that a sovereign cannot exist separate from the representation constructed by external influence. Mortimer's ability to craft Edward as a dangerous liability to the body politic further indicates the sovereign's incapacity to act against expectation. Stating, "England, unkind to thy nobility, / Groan for this grief! Behold how thou art maimed" (13.30-31), Mortimer utilizes the rhetoric of the divine sovereign to accuse Edward of defiling the realm. Thus, Marlowe's play exposes the falsity of paternalistic and absolute kingship. Because he insists on defining the difference between his personal and public bodies, giving voice to his governing desires as a human being as well as king, Edward rules without the power to impose his will on the kingdom. As a person and patriarch, he cannot be incorporated into the sovereign ideal. His refusal to assimilate stems from the concept of the superior ruler, whether within the household or in the kingdom, that needs not recognize the intertwined nature of designated gendered or political roles. Due to the construction of this portrayal, Edward is blind to the complications of the sovereign structure until the last scenes of the play.

The monarchal position possesses no room for a ruler's sexuality, and yet the patriarchal structure implicitly depends on a model of masculine control. Marlowe's play comments on a system that alternatively calls for its monarch's desexualization, stripping away the power to impose a gendered authority, even as it asserts a dominating physicality. Significantly focusing on one side of this dilemma, Marlowe's sources usually consisted of texts that "typically shift the focus from political errors (the body

politic) to fleshly homoeroticism (the temporal body)” (Bredbeck 53).² Such morality tales warn against placing lover before country, neglecting the sovereign status to the point that passions overwhelm the right to rule. Marlowe’s play, on the other hand, posits Edward and the realm as a collective victim of the social disorder attending the nobles’ revolt. When his nobles demand, “If you love us, my lord, hate Gaveston” (1.79), Edward must act to preserve his desires. If he wants to uphold his position of authority, then he has little choice but to reinforce the priority of his decisions as sovereign head. However, Edward’s passionate relations transform the manifestations of his power into unidentifiable decrees. The king’s increasing desire to empower his private self fuels the play’s sense of corrupted reality. Accordingly, Mortimer accuses Edward of defiling the kingdom’s literal and metaphorical defense from anarchy, the army. The noble states, “Thy soldiers marched like players / With garish robes, not armour” (6.182-3), creating an image of a stage play devoid of meaning. In the eyes of the nobles, the English army has failed. The protective agent of the kingdom’s social order represents a now defunct system. Against a physical enemy, the army’s ability to act may not have diminished. However, Edward’s potentially transgressive influence threatens the perception that the soldiers are a cohesive unit contained by the realm. The soldiers are no longer an example of an organized hierarchy. The kingdom’s destabilization forces the nobles to see the soldiers as men, vulnerable to their personal desires and external influence. With their sense of a controlled reality fading, the nobles attempt to reinstate their desired social order. At the same time, they fear exposure as “players” (6.182), deprived of an identity

² See Bredbeck’s *Sodomy and Interpretation: Marlowe to Milton*, 50-56, for his discussion on the narratives of Drayton and Hubert.

that determines their rightful place in courtly culture. Instead of fighting for an autonomous existence, the nobles refuse to recognize that the livelihoods they protect are predetermined by the ruling ideal. When Edward's transgressive desires help to strip away this structural façade, he brings the nobles to witness their own vulnerability within the performance of power. Their security as aristocrats relies on the ability to perform expected roles, and they must depend on the severe imposition of laws to guarantee and shape this capacity.

The dissenting nobles strive to reinforce order by dissociating Edward from his role as the realm's unifying force. The king's struggle to remove private self from public demand allows the nobles to craft an estrangement between his temporal body and the sovereign ideal. They cast Edward outside of the law, as they promote a structure that cannot absorb a fragmented representative. When he requests a final meeting with Gaveston, Edward can no longer speak through the vehicle of kingship. Ultimately, the nobles deny the "honour of a king" (9.57), for Edward's desires fall outside the "deployment of alliance: a system of marriage, of fixation and development of kinship ties, of transmission of names and property" (Foucault 106). Foucault states that "law" (87), rather than sexuality, maintains early modern social order, which is a system a monarch could utilize but cannot shape. Law and desires, often sexual, are not mutually exclusive. The social ties Foucault identifies in his text work to solidify interdependence, assuring available means by which subjects can achieve a necessary position within the realm. In this structure, the ruler faces necessary marginalization so that personal desire cannot disrupt the connective, sanctioning force royal power bestows on its subjects.

Edward's request to obtain "some nook or corner left / To frolic" (4.72-3) would therefore divide the body politic. It would cut off the focal point of governance, even if the head acts primarily as a signifier, and establish a way to insulate the sovereign from his function.

Soon after Edward's execution, a new king takes the throne and relinquishes the extent of his control in order to mold himself into an accessible entity. Edward III, the son of the deposed monarch, breaks away from the people who helped form his private self. Instead, he serves as a potential analogue to Queen Elizabeth, his youth forcing an awareness of their influence on the representation of his physical body. Anonymous lords back him, and their collective body guarantees his right to power with the statement, "Fear not, my lord. Know that you are king" (26.24). Together, the faceless nobles represent a body politic that needs be confirmed in its ability to censure and advance the sovereign's interests. With their encouragement, Edward III defies Mortimer's manipulation and imprisons his mother, effectively sealing both figures away from influencing the body politic. The sovereign reverts back to social expectation, becoming independent from his guardians even as he erases the ability for autonomous displays of power. In effect, he moves from the private world of familial transaction to the public sphere of noble homosocial connection. Like Elizabeth, the new king must actively mediate his private and public marginalization, in order to ensure a measure of control in determining the representations surrounding him. The emphasis on his "innocency" (26.102) recalls Elizabeth's virgin status, while also indicating a being far removed from the patriarchal conception that presumes dominance. Still a child, his representational

purity can preserve both the king's blood and the kingdom as a complete entity. This Edward will not allow his unconstrained passions to destabilize the realm. His active alienation and depersonalization void any claim to change the realm's conception of order. For the same reason, Elizabeth had to mediate the popular suspicion of her "lovers, in her illegitimate children, and the sexual interest in her" (Levin 89). A detached ruler should not alter the set hierarchy through introducing a subjective and unpredictable element into the portioning out of power. The country's social and political necessities must take precedence over its representative's familial and personal attachments. Serving as an example of the sovereign ideal's potential for fulfillment, Edward III rejects the example of his father at the onset of his rule. He lays the groundwork for a new era for his kingdom, as he signifies the hope that this form of shared consciousness facilitates the realm's movement away from a stasis of internal conflict towards definitive action.

Not only does his father, Edward II, place in doubt the distribution of governing power, but he turns against the concept of hereditary monarchy that could reinforce his position in the ruling line. As he isolates Isabel and denies her his favor, Edward rejects the marital structure embedded within the sovereign ideal. This decision disrupts the familial relations necessary to patriarchy. He commands of her, "[T]ill my Gaveston be repealed, / Assure thyself thou com'st not in my sight" (4.168-69). Such an order not only rejects Isabel's hierarchal position, but it also demands her alignment against the sovereign ideal. Her husband inadvertently grants her the power to warp the reigning structure, while, at the same time, constructing her as its enemy. Kate Chedgzoy suggests that "in Marlowe's dramatic worlds women are conceptualized as the objects and

medium of power rather than its agents” (249). Because women enforce homosocial bonding, Edward creates an authoritative void in which Mortimer may possess her. Dependent upon male favor, Isabel reacts to Edward’s withdrawal of support by gaining another sponsor. This transference allows Mortimer his attempts to control or contain the play’s two kings. Mortimer consumes her voice (17.14-15), and Isabel becomes a tool utilized in the subversion of Edward’s rule. By preserving within her a means to secure the throne, Isabel is necessary for the continuation of the hereditary line. Unable, or even unwilling, to establish claim over his wife, Edward calls into question his own masculinity.

In addition to the charge of uncontrolled passions, the notion of a patriarchal figure’s failed masculinity transforms into a more dangerous threat. Edward’s inability to contain such a threat weakens his basis of power, for his personal failure collapses into mismanagement of the body politic. Through this example, Marlowe establishes the potential for failure inherent to the absolute patriarchal model. Edward’s attempts to utilize his prescribed superiority in determining his self-definition ultimately crumble under the underestimated subject. Isabel acts as yet another necessary support, but Edward remains blind to her desires as a human being. Casting her as “that unnatural queen, false Isabel” (21.17), he posits her as an unidentifiable other. Edward’s disconnection from his wife derives from the assumption of patriarchal and monarchical control, which hinders him from perceiving his estranged queen as a personal and political threat. Thus, his interaction with her presumes personal consequences, while Isabel’s obvious vulnerability forces her to recognize and take advantage of the political

implications of her position. In a similar fashion, the nobles find themselves compelled to protect their status. The drama's ultimate act of appropriating control plays out in Edward's execution, wherein "a spit...red hot" (25.30) manages to penetrate the barrier insulating the patriarchal sovereign. Cruelly inverting the sexual act, the king's death suggests through its degree of violence the compulsion to reinstate a performance intact from the ruler's physical vulnerability.

Avoiding both Isabel and Edward's fate, Elizabeth retained the right to preserve her body natural. As a contrast, she stands as a figure determinedly fighting against the feared performance of a woman open to exploitation that might harm the body politic. She acted to safeguard her own right to rule, always aware that the female roles often associated with her sex placed her in danger of a suppressive control justified through such supposed exhibitions as unrestrained passions and disorderly conduct. When contrasting Isabella and Elizabeth, Dympna Callaghan writes of "a culture that defines femininity and power as mutually exclusive, antithetical entities, brought together only in enormous contradiction and with a vast national apparatus of mythology-as-ideology in the figure of the Virgin Queen" (288). Elizabeth distanced herself from personal exploitation by a system of representation that subsumed gender roles. Despite her favoritism for specific suitors, she manufactured an identity beyond the physical attainment of her subjects, and none of these men could forget that their liberty at court rested on the sovereign's satisfaction. Accordingly, through her symbolic system, "the queen occupied an intermediary position between God and her subjects as well as nature and mortals as the means to assert her divine power" (Frye 111). If Elizabeth bowed to

the social pressures to marry and reproduce, then she would have to limit herself to a single gendered position – as a female characterized by her roles as wife and mother. Of course, her representations couldn't negate all negative connotations of an unwed and alienated woman, especially of one who possessed such great power. Even metaphorically, the body politic could not subsume completely the personal identity Elizabeth suggested, simply by the fact of being human. Moreover, her symbolic tools, while constructing her sovereign and political self, also worked against her by placing her body in a position vulnerable to critique. As Robert Dudley sought to rework Elizabeth's emblematic figurations and recast her as a potential spouse dependent on a male agency, Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene* conjures up the male reliance on "chastity" as a means of guaranteeing possession over the female body. Exploiting the association between effeminacy and weakness, scenes of "Threat, rape, and captivity are the interconnected strategies Spenser's text uses to enforce its definition of chastity" (Frye 124). Forcefully, Spenser writes upon the queen's female body, crafting the image of a woman open to the claims of subjects stronger than herself. Against such constructions, Elizabeth fought to preserve her ruling right.

Marlowe presents a commentary on the system of sovereignty that brings to the forefront weaknesses inherent to the structure. As the sovereign embodies the interwoven nature of the bodies public and private, he/she finds it impossible to attain an autonomous identity separate from the demands imposed through ruling right. While his play suggests tensions surrounding Elizabeth's sexuality and personal attachments, Marlowe departs from many histories by presenting Edward as a victim and shifting the basis of the

kingdom's disorder. He doesn't outright present an overhaul of the hierarchal structure, but Marlowe's play does indicate a complication that needs be addressed. A sovereign susceptible to the whims of his subjects possesses little power to stand against or relegate rebellion. Subjects acting against the will of the court may disrupt the social performance, able to do so because the absolute monarchal system presumes assimilation and obedience under the head. The charge of a human inclination towards another can weaken a monarch. Suspicion of unrestrained passions and affections introduce familiar emotions into a structure that cannot accommodate them. No longer able to effect representation as a distant and impersonal entity, the sovereign finds his/her temporal faults placed at odds with the realm's well-being. Consequently, Elizabeth becomes the performer necessary to rule. She subverted and reshaped the sovereign ideal's flaws, rather than meeting them head-on, as she funneled her limited autonomy into her efforts at strengthening the king's two bodies. The sovereign structure as Marlowe shapes it does not work, but his play suggests the potential for a divergent kind of ruler who can transcend the contained figure of absolutism.

CHAPTER TWO

FRAGMENTATION AND THE PATRIARCHAL SYSTEM IN WEBSTER'S *THE*

DUCHESS OF MALFI

Like *Edward II*, John Webster's play *The Duchess of Malfi* addresses the right to hold power in the state and in the family, paying particular attention to a woman's position under patriarchal rule. Similar to Edward, the Duchess misjudges her exposure to familial and public censure. Unlike him, she does not flaunt her relationship, nor does she allow it to shape ruling decisions as her son's regent. Instead, Webster suggests that she cannot escape her vulnerable position in securing the familial line. The brothers' patriarchal roles within this play depend upon the Duchess's willing subjugation of her autonomous self. In a way similar to Edward II's portrayal of the sovereign ideal, the familial representation displayed in *The Duchess of Malfi* requires patriarchy's consumption of the female body and feminized desires. She is the Duchess, and yet Webster's title character ultimately falls to the cultural imperative to live the idealized performance her brothers utilize to fashion their identities. By seeking to fulfill her own desires and craft a self separate from their demands, she exposes the precarious structure that guarantees the brothers' power. The resulting tyrannical revenge enacted by the brothers reveals a system in which patriarchal power relies on the constructed and enforced alterity of women and subjects.

In focusing on the effects inflicted upon the Amalfi court, Webster demonstrates the destructive potential behind James I's absolutist representation. As an absolutist monarch, James ruled by crafting an image of himself as separate from and superior to

his subjects. He took on a patriarchal role that alienated England as an other, which worked to both isolate the sovereign from intervention and restrain the subjects' ability to enforce their own prerogatives. Like Webster's fictional brothers, the historical James acted within a system that depended on the assimilation of its subjects within a performance of social order. To achieve an absolute self-definition, James had to preclude his subjects' deviance from expected behaviors, especially as the need to do so suggested the paradox inherent to the ruling ideal. He enforced an enactment of a controlled and stable body politic, and yet Webster's play attacks the theory that such a representation was natural and divinely ordained. Through breaking down the construction the brothers seek to enforce, Webster implicates the patriarchal structure in the corrupted malleability of its inhabitants. Set in a world that necessitates an overarching blind performance, *The Duchess of Malfi* reacts against a questionable hierarchy and its designation of authority. The resulting fragmentation after the Duchess's death indicates the degree to which a patriarchal hierarchy must subsume the other to survive. The enforcement of this hierarchy estranges both sides from recognizing the complex self that relies on internalized otherness. Whether in Stuart England or Webster's Malfi, such practices that distort self-definition leave sovereigns and subjects vulnerable to exploitation. Because subjects and sovereign cannot act without acknowledging the motivations that construct the self, they must shift the ability to perform onto another.

Performed during the Jacobean period, *The Duchess of Malfi* represents a woman's determination to marry and lead a fulfilling private life. The Duchess's struggle

to live on her terms meets heavy opposition, and her attempt to craft a role separate from familial demands leads to her death. Widow to the former Duke of Malfi, she occupies a contradictory position as the kingdom's temporary regent and subordinate to her brothers. They warn her not to remarry, indicating the anxiety associated with "the extant social belief that...widows engaged in promiscuous marital liaisons" (Jankowski 36). Both Ferdinand and the Cardinal seek to control their sister's sexuality by urging its repression. However, the Duchess soon reveals a will and desires at odds with her brothers' extreme representations. She woos and marries her Steward Antonio, overlooking his low social status in favor of his good character. The play's tragic end stems from her brothers' reaction against this autonomous assertion of power, for their inability to accept her private sexuality corrupts both court and family. Their spy within the Duchess's court, the malcontent Bosola, recognizes and later reveals the Duchess's pregnancies. Convinced that his sister has transgressed upon the family line, while also plagued with images of her sexual appetite, Ferdinand insists that the Duchess commit suicide. She refuses and instead plans to escape to Malfi with children and husband. Caught by her brothers, she spends the rest of her time alive in the play imprisoned. Ferdinand relies on her captivity to at last gain control of his sister's body. He surrounds her with madmen, as he seeks to degrade his sister's self-control in order to re-assimilate her into his conceptual order. Handing her a dead man's hand, Ferdinand tells the Duchess that the appendage came from a convincing representation of her dead husband and children. Bosola and Ferdinand both attempt to dehumanize the apparently unruly Duchess, depriving her of her identity. The disorder they cultivate, however, obscures this goal,

and Bosola and executioners strangle the Duchess and her children. Her death leads to the hectic fifth act, during which Ferdinand becomes convinced he is a werewolf and Bosola seeks an ill-fated revenge. With the Duchess gone, the world of the play begins to break down at an increasingly chaotic rate. The Cardinal intentionally kills his mistress Julia, while Bosola follows this death with the accidental murder of Antonio. Bosola, Ferdinand, and the Cardinal then kill each other, and the Duchess's oldest son with Antonio finds himself the heir to Malfi's throne.

By casting the Duchess at the center of the play's turmoil, Webster explores the socially constructed impetus to contain the female body. As characters strive to reassert their perception of social order, they act through a limiting binary that reflects early modern constructions separating the male and the female. According to Theodora Jankowski, "it is virtually impossible to think of women except in terms of how they relate to the marriage bond or to their use by men: as virgin (unmarried women); wives; or widows" (24). The gendered hierarchy defines male position and selfhood. However, the order results in failure to acknowledge female identity as separate from the perceptions imposed upon women. A woman's inability, or even refusal, to comply with idealized notions of the chaste female could therefore justify repression. After learning of his sister's private relations, Ferdinand categorizes himself as one of the "Foolish men, / That e'er will trust their honour in a bark / Made of so slight, weak bulrush as is woman, / Apt every minute to sink it" (2.5.33-36). His words implicate the Duchess in the crisis of identity that drives this play. Here, Webster underlines the tendency that contributes to an increasing sense of confusion. Ferdinand locates the failure of hierarchal containment in

female weakness, but, in doing so, he blinds himself to the instability of his own performances. The brothers must cast remarriage as unnecessarily “luxurious” (1.2.13) because only then can they secure the rigid structure that suppresses and shapes female inclination. Thus, they expect her to suspend her desires and create a void through which they guarantee right to power. The patriarchal order the brothers rely on hinges on a framework of uncontested authority, which involves command of the Duchess’s private and public bodies.

By seeking to take control of her desires, the Duchess disrupts the performance of patriarchal power. As a result, the brothers’ mounting anxiety suggests that the structure crucial to their identity cannot fully integrate feminine desires. Their obsession over controlling their sister’s sexuality brings to the forefront unnatural and chaotic passions. Hattaway suggests that “female ‘liberty’ was seen as a threat to the whole social order” (109), but Webster’s work explicitly perverts the incentive to possess the Duchess’s private body. Imagining his sister’s sexual relations “with some strong-thighed bargeman” (2.5.42), Ferdinand inserts himself into the Duchess’s private desires. He reveals a compulsion, bordering on the incestuous, that culminates in his sister’s imprisonment. His preoccupation with her sexuality “suggests the tyrant’s dependence on the Other that he tries to dominate in order to achieve autonomy” (Bushnell 153). The Duchess’s will and sexual control threatens their patriarchal superiority. Their claim on her body begins to fracture, challenging the gender hierarchy that secures their position. Ultimately, the play’s tragedy hinges on their need to restore this spectrum of difference, which protects them from recognizing the disintegration of their ordered world. By

rejecting the feminine and repressing the Duchess's satisfaction, they could rewrite her as the means to sustain their identities. Her pregnancies thus serve as an example of their helplessness, spurring Ferdinand to instruct, "We must not now use balsamum, but fire - / The smarting cupping-glass, for that's the mean / To Purge infected blood, such blood as hers" (2.5.23-26). He reshapes her into a transgressive force, corrupting the idealized image that he and his brother accept as essential to themselves. They deny her the power to claim herself, as they make her the source of the family's disorder. Her desires infect and warp them all, transforming the Duchess into a dehumanized entity that needs to be cleansed. However, when they take action to strip her influence from the realm, the brothers consequently undermine their ability to act effectively. They participate in their own fragmentation by destroying the focus of their obsession.

The Duchess of Malfi brings to the forefront the performative nature of identity, and it highlights the destructive consequences that result from fighting to preserve inadequate social constructs. Adherence to hierarchical structures sustains the reigning system, but ultimately hurts the subjects. The patriarchal system not only excludes acknowledgement of female autonomy, but it also deprives the people in power the ability to integrate their personal desires rather than displacing them onto others. Ferdinand's suggestion to his sister, "This darkness suits you well" (4.1.30), points to the total blindness that keeps him from recognizing the roles his sister and followers actually play. He cannot see his sister as separate from the gendered constructs he places onto her, nor can he recognize the court as more than an extension of his character. He remonstrates, "Why do you laugh? Methinks you that are courtiers / Should be my

touchwood: take fire when I give fire” (1.2.41-42). Ferdinand’s perception of the world around him extends beyond his sister, as he calls upon the court to assimilate his desires. Though Alan Walworth focuses on the distancing between male and female constructs, his essay underlines a point that addresses the effects on the people acting under the brothers and, by extension, James I. Walworth discusses the “transferential dynamics of desire and deception, figured in tropes of loss, incorporations, and control, to mediate cultural anxieties surrounding the female body as the potential site of grotesque and transgressive openness” (54-55). In both worlds, the patriarchal entity, whether ruler or familial head, strives to preserve his representation as an invulnerable and absolute being. Recognition of marginalized subjects places into conflict the framework within which the acting head justifies his authority. Ferdinand attempts to reduce his sister and Bosola into “mere reflective witnesses to his absolute surpassing” (Whigham 267), but he overlooks their influence in the construction of his supposedly impenetrable identity. Recognizing the similar human nature of the play’s tyrannical characters, Bosola states, “Some would think the souls of princes were brought forth by some more weighty / cause than those of meaner persons; they are deceived. / There’s the same hand to them, the like passions sway / them” (2.1.106-10). He suggests the dangerous potential in following a questionable patriarchal authority. Able to see beyond the given hierarchy, Bosola displays a consciousness that evaluates the brothers’ performance of power. Nevertheless, even he finds himself assimilated into an ordered structure which overpowers his right to action.

Despite his status as the play's patriarch, Ferdinand embodies an unsustainable version of absolutist rule. He is a figure analogous to Marlowe's Edward II, as he creates an inversion of the early modern ideology that posits the ruler as true representative of the people. When Ferdinand asks Bosola's opinion on his handling of the Duchess, the malcontent remarks, "That you / Are your own chronicle too much, and grossly / Flatter yourself" (3.1.87-89). Throughout the play, Ferdinand and the Cardinal remain removed from the people capable of mediating their actions. The brothers operate in a world shaped by their perceptions, and their total isolation blinds them from recognizing the agency invested within their subjects. Accordingly, the Cardinal tells a conflicted Julia, "Still you are to thank me" (2.4.36), and Ferdinand's obsession over his sister's sexuality drives even further the self-consumptive nature of his position. Both brothers transform the people around them into subordinate entities, even to the extent that they perceive the given ruler as their wife-like substitute. By relegating the Duchess to an imprisoned state under their control, the brothers assume the authority to alter the political hierarchy. Their "instigation," and not "justice" (3.4.33-34), motivates them to constrain others' movements to fulfill their private desires. This model holds until the Duchess's death reveals the performance necessary to maintain it, and Bosola finally perceives his compromised will. Renounced by Ferdinand, he states, "And, though I loathed the evil, yet I loved / You that did counsel it, and rather sought / To appear a true servant than an honest man" (4.2.320-22). Unlike the Duchess, Bosola capitulates to his role as "an extension of Ferdinand" (Rowe 104) by placing his power of self-control under Ferdinand's direction. He hands over his humanity as a subject, which leads to his

carrying out an extreme manifestation of Ferdinand's anxiety. Whigham states, "Self-defeated, Ferdinand also fails his subjects: instead of acting as the traditional fount of identity to them, he generates the loss of their identity, striving to become more of himself by reducing others" (268). Ironically, by degrading the self-control of his subjects, Ferdinand actually dissociates himself from his humanity. He rather becomes less of "himself" as he strips away the social indicators that construct him. As a result, none of the characters may reach the self-actualization required to mend their fragmented selves, for each embeds within another the source of his corruption. Though he orders his sister's death, Ferdinand asks Bosola, "Was I her judge? / Did any ceremonial form of law / Doom her to not-being?" (4.2.288-90). Because he passes down to his subject his authority to act, Ferdinand can no longer acknowledge his own decisions. Moreover, at the end of the play, he cannot even recognize himself. Believing himself transformed into a werewolf, Ferdinand attempts to destroy his "shadow" (5.2.32). The act of killing the Duchess proves the catalyst that destroys his crafted world, alienating him from the fragmented self that his sister's death forces him to face.

Contrasting two forms of rule, Webster associates Ferdinand with an excessive governance that counteracts any potential for an affirmative reign. The Duchess serves as an Elizabeth figure, but rather one forcibly divided from her subjects by the unrestrained nature of Ferdinand's obsessions. Exploitation of the patriarchal imperative thus transforms both subjects and their representative into unidentifiable and disjointed beings. Although Elizabeth's reign remained connected to the unease associated with female rule, Webster's work hearkens back nostalgically to Elizabeth's representation as

the personal and political embodiment of her people. Describing Elizabethan depictions following her death, John Watkins writes, “As the old absolutist figurations of monarchy fell into disrepute, she held out the promise of a new kind of sovereign who, instead of standing mystically apart from the people, epitomized their values and experiences” (55). The image of Elizabeth as “a limited monarch” (58), open to her people, guaranteed her realm a measure of security against the potential threat of a tyrant’s irrational passions. Accordingly, figurations of the play’s transgressive tyrants associate them with “a pair of hearts [that] are hollow graves, / Rotten and rotting others” (4.2.308-09). The brothers’ inability to recognize their own internal corruption leads to the distortion of their world. Their separation from the body politic, their servants and their family, stresses the possibility of an absolutist power that cannot be checked, and disrupts the realm’s order through which subjects secure their identities. Thus, the memory of Elizabeth suffuses this play with a doubled sense of wrong, as the brothers impose their uncontrolled desires onto the female ruler. Ferdinand presumes a right to her body, claiming, “I could kill her now / In you or in myself, for I do think / It is some sin in us heaven doth revenge / By her” (2.5.62-66). He enacts a version of the Tudor period fear regarding marital patriarchal possession of Elizabeth. Through Ferdinand, Webster utilizes the subversive element of brother’s incestuous fixation to challenge the concept of an absolutist patriarch. Neither brother can perceive the extent to which his subject position is underwritten by his sister because they confuse her as part of their internal makeup. With no will of her own, she cannot establish herself as a mother, a regent, or even as their own sister. She represents the isolated subject always at odds with the illusion of

autonomy necessary to find a measure of satisfaction or fulfillment in the early modern world.

By locating deviation within the subjects, the absolute sovereign possesses the right to alter or banish the source of transgression. Webster's play indicates the ease with which absolutism leads to abuses of this power. If Elizabeth transgressed against the expected and claimed patriarchal right to rule, she made herself vulnerable to accusations that she was a tyrannical woman. Yet James took on this role from the beginning of his English rule, slotting himself into the available position of the kingdom's husband and head (Goldberg 31). He backed his image as the realm's patriarch by utilizing "Divine Right, and the language of paternal love and willing obedience" (117). According to his representations, God and the divine concept of kingship granted James the right to determine and enforce the behavioral standards imposed on his subjects. In his role, James stood as the objective embodiment of his people, but Ferdinand's classification of his sister's dead children as "young wolves" (4.2.249) emphasizes the possibility of an extreme disassociation. James' advice to his son on choosing a wife provides a fitting example of the relationship between absolutist ruler and subject:

Ye are the head, she is your body: It is your office to commaund, and hers to obey; but yet with such a sweet harmony, as shee should be as readie to obey, as yee to commaund; as willing to followe, as ye to go before: your love beeing wholie knit unto her, and all her affections lovingly bent to followe your will.

(Basilikon Doron 61)

Ruling his country as its metaphorical husband and father, James justified constraining his subjects. His speeches and texts forged a social order characterized by a sovereign's unimpeded reign, as wife and subjects fell into their essentialized roles and served the king. That the Duchess questions this complementary nature suggests a break from the idealized alliance between king and country. She asks, "Must I, like to a slave-born Russian, / Account it praise to suffer tyranny?" (3.5.74-75). She suffers under the pressure to fulfill a predetermined role that fails to define her. Her words manifest the anxiety that a corrupted patriarch may contaminate subject representation. With such a tyrannical figure, "Webster's play repeatedly associates Ferdinand with an arbitrary political tyranny that turns out to be inseparable from the tangled web of his illicit sexual desires" (Marcus 27). Here, the nature of Ferdinand's power reflects the inseparable nature of the sovereign body. As he hands his sister their "father's poniard" (1.2.246), Ferdinand unconsciously mixes a symbol of lineage with one suggestive of sexual domination. He associates controlling his sister's physical body with the management of the realm. His personal desires consequently warp the political and social performance he demands from family and subjects.

The patriarchal ideal Webster depicts upholds a performance devoid of meaning. In marginalizing the subject, the impetus to conform to the brothers' excessive regulation casts the divergent will as an unnatural, feminized disruption. Bosola's observation, "It seems you would create me / One of your familiars" (1.2.175-76) plays on the absorption of a subject with the use of demonic imagery. Here, the play foreshadows the self-destructive nature of the patriarchal model's shaping influence. Ferdinand claims both

mind and body, and therefore Bosola has little choice but to take part in the brothers' transgression upon the realm. He exists in a system that calls for him to, as James states, "let your owne life be a law-book and a mirroure to your people...and therein they may see, by your image, what life they should leade" (*Basilikon Doron* 45). Ironically, Antonio uses similar imagery when he first describes the Duchess. He suggests, "Let all sweet ladies break their flattering glasses / And dress themselves in her" (1.2.122-23). His words identify the Duchess as the moral center of the play; however, even he participates in suppressing her feminine self-definition. He paints her as an exception to her sex, an ideal that women should aspire to reach. Despite his love for the Duchess, Antonio shares in the "blindness" (Goldberg 122) that hinders the head from justly governing the body. Recognized as the play's moral, "goodly" (1.2.327) male figure, Antonio nevertheless gives voice to the limiting constructions promoted by the brothers. Antonio takes on a perception shaped by the play's aspiring absolutists, even as he aligns himself with the enemy to their reign. The brothers must silence that which makes the Duchess human, relegating her to the extreme definitions of chaste ideal or sexual deviant. By doing so, they try to obscure the element of chaos she introduces into the given hierarchy. Her virtuous resistance cannot break through the performance of social order, for she has no protection against the brothers' access to her private body. Ferdinand obtains "a false key / Into her bedchamber" (3.1.80-1), indicating the vulnerability intrinsic to the Duchess's life. He crafts the Duchess into the image of "a notorious strumpet" (2.5.4), which allows him to deprive her of meaningful self-representation. As Bushnell observes, "Even if women are represented as weak

physically and politically, in the masculine imagination and myth they are terrifyingly powerful, demanding containment” (23). Ferdinand’s alienation of the Duchess classifies her effeminate, apparently discordant, passions as a dangerous element within their world. In order to protect against exposure, the patriarchal ideal must therefore deny its dependence on the feminine. Bosola struggles against this recognition, stating, “This is manly sorrow. / These tears, I am very certain, never grew / In my mother’s milk” (4.2.350-52). Unable to align his expected performance with his conflicting emotions, Bosola attempts to defy the patriarchal hierarchy. His decision to revenge the Duchess marginalizes him, casting Bosola out of the performance of power because he can no longer actively comply with his given roles. His emotional reaction, on the other hand, associates him with a disorderly femininity that the patriarchal structure must confine in order to remain intact.

Webster’s play takes the organism of the family and destabilizes the performance necessary to hold it together. In its drive to guard against weakness, the patriarchal structure preys upon itself. *The Duchess of Malfi* depends on the parallel between familial structure and the sovereign ideal to address the notion of an essentialized right to power. Webster displays the consequences of such a performance gone wrong, aware that “any admission of the extent of patriarchal power must be censored” (Hattaway 109). Such blindness protects the early modern structure from alteration, as it obscures the subjective nature of authority. However, the veiling of the mechanisms through which people may gain power also deprives subjects of the means to attain it. Because of her refusal to compromise her morality, the Duchess finds the means of controlling her representation

denied her, as embodied in the stasis of a “figure cut in alabaster” (1.2.364). Thus, her brothers justify suppressing, and subsequently destroying, the Duchess within a world that disavows a disruptive and passionate femininity. Bosola, on the other hand, subverts his concept of self. Unlike the Duchess, he accepts his given role until her death forces him to question the motivations that drive him. Near the beginning of the play, Delio reacts to Antonio’s description of Ferdinand with the statement, “Then the law to him / Is like a foul black cobweb to a spider: / He makes it his dwelling and a prison / To entangle those shall feed him” (1.2.95-99). This feeding imagery occurs a few more times in the text, as the characters continue to associate the brothers with a kind of parasitic predator. Facing death, the Duchess says to Bosola, “Go tell my brothers, when I am laid out, / They then may feed in quiet” (4.2.227-28). Such descriptions suggest that the brothers’ influence deprives their subjects of both agency and internal selfhood. When Ferdinand and the Cardinal order the Duchess’s death, they attempt to destroy the appointed source of conflict. Instead, the brothers destabilize the hierarchy that determines authority, and their adherence to a set perception of order dehumanizes them and the court as a whole. Ferdinand’s lament, “I bade thee, when I was distracted of my wits, / Go kill my dearest friend, and thou hast done’t” (4.2.268-9), exposes the disconnect between characters that erases the ability to relate to each other. The patriarchal figure emerges as a man with limited power, having immersed his desires and the power to act on them within his apparent subject. Moreover, the parasitic imagery furthers the notion that their reality necessitates a Duchess figure, a feminine counterpoint to patriarchal absolutism. Thus, Bosola blames the brothers for the realm’s distortion: “When thou killed’st thy sister /

Thou took'st from Justice her most equal balance, / And left her naught but her sword" (5.5.36-38). The threat Bosola's charge indicates applies to Webster's time because it comes from the repression of marginalized subjects' right to power. In his system of representation, James presents himself as "a little God to fitte on his Throne, and rule over other men" (*Basilikon Doron* 2). Throughout his reign, James utilized the divine ideal of kingship to preclude conflict and rebellion. If people fought against exposure to the king's potentially swayed influence, they revealed themselves as dissenters against the good of the kingdom. James's position relied on his subjects taking on as natural the roles given them within the bounds of the body politic. Though James argued that a monarchical system such as his was "the only defense against anarchy" (Bushnell 139), Webster's play addresses the possibility that a tyrant infects the construct he fits upon the body politic. If led by a sovereign largely unimpeded by the court, a realm has little defense against a corrupted private body. The absolute ruler could introduce chaos into the kingdom, for this ruling ideology rests on a human being's capacity to uphold a performative transcendence of and detachment from his subjects.

The Duchess of Malfi shows that the ambiguously moral world of the playwright's time won't fit into the ordered constructs securing hierarchal status. Webster deconstructs an allegedly certain structure, and he displays the contradictory nature of patriarchal rule. Like the theatre, this performance requires the complicity of its actors and audience, but breaking open this reality threatens to reveal the self-referential vulnerability of the participants on both sides. Finally acknowledging his marginalized autonomy, Bosola calls upon the dying Duchess, "Return, fair soul, from darkness, and lead mine / Out of

this sensible hell” (4.2.331-2). His repentance indicates his coming to awareness of the Duchess’s necessity in this world. This regret comes too late, and inevitably cannot atone for the crimes committed. In Webster’s fictional world, recognition of human fragmentation and marginalized subjects proves useless against the constraints barring an individual from effective action. As the absolutist ruler, James may take advantage of this representation, and Webster’s Bosola reflects on the potential helplessness of a people unable to move out of the constraints already imposed on them. By claiming the sovereign’s body politic as an accurate mirror of his society, James erases the supposedly transgressive impulses he refuses to comprehend. The patriarchal structure, whether applied to the family or sovereign right, compels a conformity that blinds its participants from the influences shaping their lives. Thus, the given patriarch fails to perceive that the system granting him power requires the subordinated being. In this way, Webster’s play touches on a collective fear regarding the theatricality of the past and present world. Levine discusses “the fear of effeminization” (6) within early modern anti-theatricality that arises in response to the ambiguous self. Rooted within anxiety over the theatre, she locates the concern that men “have no way of knowing they are men except in the re-enactment, the relentless re-enactment, of their own masculinity” (7). In connection with this worry, the implication surfaces that gender can be taken away, impeded, or changed. The concept of possessing a natural masculinity or femininity transforms into a mutable design. The drive to cover this possibility derives from the fear that a person has no control over his/her self. Thus, allowing transgressive desires to affect ruler and body politic destabilizes the tenuous hold a monarch has on power. Such occurrences make

apparent the flawed, partial entity that really composes the image of the sovereign and familial ideal. James's sovereign structure depends on obscuring the enactment, keeping his mechanisms of power outside of the people's grasp. Yet Webster's use of the patriarchal system highlights the general need to face the failure of such ideals. By utilizing characters fighting to achieve their humanity, he calls for a reassessment of the system that guarantees social status.

CHAPTER THREE

TRYANNY AND THE ASSUALT ON THE BODY POLITIC IN ELIZABETH

CARY'S *TRAGEDY OF MARIAM*

The previous two chapters discussed social anxieties over a patriarchal sovereign's potential abuse of his absolutist position. James I, as the country's head and supreme representative, moored his ideology in patriarchal familial ideals believed necessary to maintain order. Though Webster's play and Elizabeth Cary's *Tragedy of Mariam* differ greatly in context and character focus, each work exhibits a conscious critique of the structure that secures family and reigning hierarchy. Both playwrights represent the patriarchal ideal as threatening subjects' wills, funneling actions and desires into socially anticipated performances. The assumption of complete sovereignty ironically exposed the body politic to potential transgression, which could alienate the ruler as much as the people subjugated under his rule. Such estrangement creates a double bind neither may reconcile. The stable performance that rests on this paradox sets subjects and sovereign against recognizing the relationships crucial to their identity formation. Thus, both plays deal with the trope of the tyrannical ruler, casting the brothers and Herod as the unnatural transgressors against the realm, as well as against their constructed selves.

Cary's play establishes the vulnerability inherent to the patriarchal role. Herod reigns over, and is paradoxically dominated by, others' outside motivations which he cannot identify. Like the sovereign representatives from the plays of the previous two chapters, he fails to achieve the ideal of an isolated sovereign. Driven by a conflation of

the personal and the political, the historical King Herod transforms into a figure closed off from the voices that construct the body politic. The need to maintain his representation incites Herod to repress the marginalized voices of wife and subjects. In order to maintain the illusion of a unified realm, he attempts to cast out dissenters to his will. The performative monarch nevertheless falls victim to Salome's exploitation of his delusionary position. Exploring the impetus to manipulate the ruling ideal, this chapter moves on to the unacknowledged others affected by the enactment imposed upon them. *The Tragedy of Mariam* reflects its closet drama inheritance, as the play's private circulation corresponds to the enclosed isolation of its sovereign and subjects. Moreover, Cary draws from a medieval tradition of the extreme Herod figure, one so excessive as to exist almost as a caricature of the absurd tyrant. She presents an extreme critique of James that deviates from the previously addressed stage performances in its bleak finality. As an incomplete and irrational figure, Herod epitomizes the threat of James I's system of representation. The patriarchal structure generates corruption, as it isolates within the sovereign the authority to shape subjects and kingdom. An absolute sovereign's ability to maintain unacknowledged dependence on his subjects, especially on feminine and effeminate figures, therefore solidifies his performance of rule. Yet Cary underscores her play with the irony that Herod's actions to impose his absolute power reveal the deceptions and exclusions necessary to establish his constructed superiority.

Set within the tyrant's household, and dominated primarily by women, *The Tragedy of Mariam* depicts the consuming and destructive nature of the patriarchal ideal. Elizabeth Cary's closet drama establishes a world both private and political, in which a

subject's personal desires lay exposed to the skewed commands of an illogical sovereign. Despite this reality, the play begins with the characters attempting to reach a fulfilling existence without the restraints determined by their sovereign. When the characters receive the false news of Herod's death, they immediately consider how to take advantage of this situation. Mariam reveals by monologue that Herod commanded her execution if news of his own death reached their kingdom. She displays contrasting emotions of relief and grief, but she gains the ability to cultivate such conflicting passions outside of her husband's manipulation. Her mother, however, vents her hatred and reminds her daughter of Herod's politically motivated murders of Mariam's brother and grandfather. To Alexandra, this king of "raging lunacy" (I.ii.46) defiles throne and divine right. Herod's sister Salome, on the other hand, finds her brother's death a disadvantage in her desire to marry the Arabian Silleus. Unable to expose her husband's treason to Herod, Salome must find another way to divorce herself from her husband. Her plans for deception depend on Herod's complicity, which will later intertwine both siblings within a doubled performance. In contrast, Pheroras's plans to satisfy his desires rest on Herod's absence. He rushes towards the marriage denied him by his brother, seeking to wed his slave Graphina instead of his appointed fiancé. Also finally able to supersede Herod's commands, Constabarus takes the sons of Baba out of hiding, and the scene reveals the friendship over which he performed this treasonous act.

Yet this new reality soon falls apart, as the characters learn of Herod's continued existence. Salome expresses her pleasure that her venue for absolute divorce has once again opened. She agrees to aid Pheroras if her brother reveals Constabarus' disloyalty.

Refusing to take similar advantage of Herod's homecoming, Mariam states, "I have forsworn his bed" (III.iii.16), and vows to preserve her chastity. She sets herself up for misinterpretation, as she fails to live up to Herod's expectation of a loving wife. Deprived of even the façade of their unity, both Mariam and Herod fall prey to Salome's machinations. With a butler's complicity, Salome leads her brother to believe his wife wishes to poison him. Herod imprisons Mariam and sentences her to death, making her yet another dissenter he reflexively punishes for disobedience. Both Mariam and Constabarus lose their lives to the motives and/or disinformation of Herod's siblings, which the ruler mistakenly takes as his own version of reality. Following Mariam's execution, Herod learns of the butler's suicide and confessed deception, along with Alexandra's act of turning against her daughter. Herod's confusion increases as he denies the possibility of Mariam's death, and yet he ends the play attaining comprehension of her absence and gains the private desire to die. He realizes too late that his identity rests on Mariam's presence, as Herod can begin to acknowledge the missing, crucial piece of himself.

Through her portrayal of a tyrannical, illogical king, Cary depicts the model of the "king's two bodies" as a system that insulates an absolute ruler's abuse of power. The sovereign's detachment from his subjects precipitates the substitution of the personal body for the body politic. *The Tragedy of Mariam* thus manipulates early modern anxieties generated by the sovereign's expected role as the realm's governing body. Cary places Herod in the position of James, while casting her fellow subjects as the victims of a despotism defined by its ruler's historical "decadence" (Beilin 140). She sets Herod's

rule against that of the present sovereign, inciting an uneasy parallel to James' system of rule. Regarding James's coronation, Jonathan Goldberg draws from Dekker's reflection on the performative husband of the realm: "His presence gives them life; his absence robs them. Their existence depends upon him" (31).³ James perceived his subjects through his personal and political framework. He utilized a representation that intermixed his country and his self, relying on his subjects to corroborate his complete identity. However, Cary's play addresses the ramifications that may occur when a tyrannical and dangerous sovereign fails to recognize this dependence. The absolutist Herod also assumes himself the ultimate embodiment of his subjects. His inability to accept divergent behaviors derives from the necessity to maintain this illusion. In this way, Herod perverts an ideal meant to protect and enable its people. When Mariam fails to shape her welcome to his expectations, Herod exclaims, "I will not speak, unless to be believed! / This froward humour will not do you good. / It hath too much already Herod grieved / To think that you on terms of hate have stood" (IV.iii.52-55). Because Mariam refuses to reflect Herod's prescribed behaviors, the sovereign reads her melancholy as an act of rebellion. He perceives her as both a subject and a wife, for both roles intermix within the combined private and public body. Accordingly, biblical marriage and the legal system of coverture, in which "husband and wife were one flesh...one person" (Stretton 42) corresponds to the ruling ideology James promoted. In *The true law of free monarchies*, he states, "As the discourse and direction flows from the head, and the execution

³ Additionally, Stephanie Hodgson-Wright addresses James' representation, stating, "One of the central tropes in James VI and I's particular brand of Protestant hegemony was that the domestic household and the State should mirror each other in structure and governance" ("Not Kissing" 171).

according thereunto belongs to the rest of the members, every one according to his office, so is it betwixt a wise Prince and his subjects” (173). Though James indicates the necessity of subjects to construct his ruling identity, he places himself as the source of reason and the appointed protector of social order. An ideal sovereign determines judgment when a subject deviates from his/her appointed role, but Herod’s characterization points to the ease with which a patriarchal ruler may dominate a subject’s personal and political representation. Because Mariam fails to perform the wifely role expected of her, Herod justifies his impassioned decision for her execution: “Oh thine eye / Is pure as heaven, but impure thy mind, / And for impurity shall Mariam die” (IV.iv.32-34). Attempting to gain control over her mind and body, Mariam inadvertently steps out of the bounds erected by her king and husband. Thus, he may rewrite her as a traitor and an other guilty of transgression against the realm’s overarching entity.

Aware that patriarchal and absolute power hinge on a compulsory performance, Cary interrogates the sovereign’s authority to impose a skewed framework on his people. She presents a sovereign unable to differentiate between his personal inclinations and the surrounding court. , Cary inverts the figure of the divinely ordained monarch by merging with her theatrical kingdom a figure that Josephus records as representing “absolutism at its worst possible effects, the destruction of ‘the politike order’” (Beilin 146). The failure to maintain his desired version of order ironically manifests before Herod as an internal weakness, which causes him to lash out against those who overtly challenge his rule. When he requests of Mariam, “Yet smile my dearest Mariam, do but smile / And I will

all unkind conceits exile” (IV.iii.56-57), he displays a comprehension limited to surface projection. Herod’s position as patriarch of his country and his marriage leads to the delusion that he may coerce his wife and subjects into acting as true extensions of himself. Closed off from the marginalized voices, he “causes her silence to be read not as evidence of visible feminine honesty but as proof of deceptive, unchaste disloyalty” (Oh 186). Acknowledgment of a dissenting voice threatens the “unstable ground” (IV.iii.61) upon which Herod bases his power, as it allows the potential for an alternative social order. Mariam’s efforts to preserve her chastity and moral stance threatens Herod’s constructed image of his wife. His decision that “certain ‘tis she lived too wantonly, / And therefore shall she never more be free” (IV.iv.99-100) derives from the sovereign ideal’s necessity to cast out deviation. No longer able to comprehend her desires, Herod reflexively strives to isolate and suppress the subject who threatens an existence apart from the hierarchal performance. The circumstances that generate this challenge to patriarchal authority reflect a society in which “Protestant reformation of marriage laws in particular effectively fused all forms of authority over women, both spiritual and temporal, into the figure of the husband” (“Not Kissing” 168). Such power, however, depends on the subject’s tacit confirmation of the patriarch’s superiority; moreover, wife and subjects must define themselves through their relation to him. Thus, Constabarus’s “friendship fixed on virtue” (II.ii.28) with the sons of Babas also falls under Herod’s frantic scramble to reassert his power. The connection between Constabarus and the two brothers suggests the inability to maintain homosocial bonds strong enough to transcend Herod’s influence.

Subjecting the court to his personal and private desires, this fictional Herod violates the sanctioned family unit from which he himself ensures authority. Through him, Cary challenges the image of an absolutist patriarchal entity that possesses the power to place himself in conflict with the naturalized aspects of the realm. Undermining the body politic, such a sovereign would attempt to replace it with a fragmented structure that necessitates his intervention. The play's presentation of Herod's court foregrounds this conflict and exposes Herod's ability to restructure family and subject relations as a fabrication. Though convinced of his necessary omnipresence, Herod's entrance into the play signals its descent into tragedy. With his entrance, the structure securing position and status buckles under Salome's manipulations and Mariam's accusations. Both women represent threats to the absolute sovereign's perceived reality, as one subverts the patriarchal ideal from within and the other directly confronts the king's right to power. After learning of her brother's imminent return, Salome decides to turn Herod against his wife. She states, "Now tongue of mine with scandal load her name, / Turn hers to fountains, Herod's eyes to flame" (III.ii.65-66). Certain that Herod takes her conformity for granted, Salome shapes Herod's fears and turns him against himself. Herod cannot recognize his sister's deception because she mimics the performance expected of her. Moreover, the expected subjugation of his subjects fails to account for the power placed in the hands of its participants. As a result, Herod transgresses against a part of himself, violating the integrity of his wife's identity and suppressing the crucial feminine influence necessary to maintain a balanced self. He casts Mariam as a "false creature" (IV.iv.68) and fashions her as a danger through which others may influence the sovereign

subject. Unable to control her, Herod depends on Mariam's otherness to authenticate and define his rule. However, when "[h]er body is divided from her head" (V.i.90), Herod faces the destruction of the illusion that contains effeminacy within the female body. His compulsion to execute Mariam derives from the ruling system's inability to incorporate the feminine. The performance of power rests on relocating vulnerability, and yet it conversely establishes disorder within the figure of the sovereign. Touching on the representative parallels between early modern tyranny and dangerously impassioned women, Bushnell states that "'effeminacy' in man matches the figure of the 'disorderly' woman, who is ruled by the lower powers of desire rather than the masculine principle of reason" (68). In Cary's play, the structure of patriarchal absolutism isolates the blind and erratic sovereign from censure; moreover, it allows Herod to replace his familial subjects with a surface projection that overwhelms them.

By contrasting the characters' initial state of apparent liberty with their condition after Herod's return, *The Tragedy of Mariam* shows that patriarchal absolutism encourages deception in its subjects. The sovereign's inability to perceive fully the structure supporting him compels his subjects to take on roles that threaten to warp their constructed selves. Accordingly, the reinstatement of Herod's rule preserves only those characters who willingly shape their performative identities to fit his expectations. Mariam dies for refusing to accept her given role, while Salome survives by seemingly embracing hers, and yet both characters attempt to claim ownership of their bodies and minds. Although Mariam fails to shape her behavior and secure her place in the social order, she understands the power granted her through her femininity: "I know I could

enchain him with a smile / And lead him captive with a gentle word. / I scorn my look should ever man beguile, / Or other speech, than meaning to afford” (III.iii.45-48).

Mariam exhibits faith in chastity, naively believing that she may preserve her body from unfaithfulness to her husband and herself. Eschewing deception, she strives to present herself as a transparent figure, true to her desires and her standard of morality. Like Constabarus and Sohemus, the character of Mariam presents another calculated divergence from Josephus, as their adherence to personal principles finds itself magnified in the focused household setting. In effect, these three “stand out as characters of integrity, which is a considerable change from the characters as they appear in Cary’s source material, where each is motivated mainly by self-interest (“Not Kissing” 167). Thus, the playwright illustrates a world in which those people who refuse to compromise their morality and please their sovereign must face retaliation.

Elizabeth Cary herself decided to take measures necessary to secure her concept of self, as well as that of her children, from the demands of her husband and the surrounding societal expectations that promoted his ideological superiority. She recognized and reacted against the compulsion that could change her into a type of Salome, who claims her “impudency” (I.iv.33-36) and grasps a measure of control by submitting her external self to censure. To enforce her separation, Cary’s public conversion to Catholicism had to prove a catalyst that indefinitely alienated her from her Protestant husband. She became part of another marginalized identity, but this religious self allowed her greater freedom to claim her beliefs rather than accepting the framework associated with marital unity. Though she wrote *The Tragedy of Mariam* more than ten

years before her conversion, Cary wrote into her play an awareness of the paradoxical nature of female position. She draws on “the seventeenth-century claim that religious conviction actually sanctioned both a woman’s resistance to her husband and a subject’s resistance to her monarch” (Kegl 137); however, her play also suggests that a wife and subject can never attain full autonomy from patriarchal definition. Cary had to depend on supporters such as Charles I. Moreover, she passed on her Catholicism to her children, defying social expectations. Mother and children chose to conform to the performance of an other protected under weakened, but still existing, traditions, even as Cary’s play suggests that deviation from a set path may expose a subject to a seemingly justified domination. Mariam, in other words, finds her decision to conform to the chaste female ideal her sole consolation from Herod’s corruptive influence, as well as her undoing.

Cary and Mariam’s acts of rebellion both subvert the precarious nature of the performance that determines authority. The ruling concept proves impossible because it depends on a human being’s ability to transcend his/her personal inclinations and weaknesses. The private nature of the closet drama fits this dilemma, as a genre “that characterizes the household as a network of political and aesthetic preferences; and that views both regional and national identities through the lens of that household” (Kegl 141). The privacy of this genre locates within the family the means to perceive the state, allowing subjects to comment on the accepted system of power. However, it also establishes the social estrangement that necessitates such secrecy. This genre’s isolation reflects the vulnerability described in the play, as the characters possess few means to protect themselves against the combined force of hierarchal difference and reigning

ideals. In such a system, the desire to forge common, human bonds transforms the sovereign, and by extension his/her subjects, into a dangerous liability. Thus, Elizabeth ruled by carefully mediating interaction and James surrounded himself with favorites, generating “widespread criticism of James as overly proliferate and insulated from public duty” (Perry 1071-72). Able to utilize his role as an absolute patriarch, James suppressed the image of a vulnerable, potential subject by establishing over it his divinely ordained position.

In *Mariam*, however, Herod’s blindness brings him to divide himself. Lamenting his wife’s death, he states, “But Herod’s wretched self hath Herod crossed / She was my graceful moi’ty, me accursed, / To slay my better half and save my worst” (V.i.132-34). His words destabilize the basis of sovereignty as they reveal the system that intertwines his self with his subjects. By destroying his wife, he attacks himself and the country he represents. At the end of the play, Herod realizes that he is unable to contain his wife and subjects. Despite the power he holds over them, “If the dominant ideology prescribes total alignment between inner subjectivity and outer-representation in a subordinate subject – in this case, women – it fosters the very hypocrisy it fears because it is impossible to control the negative feelings of subordinate subjects” (Oh 203). In order to fulfill his role as an absolute ruler, Herod has to effectively suppress rebellion to the point that it transforms into a nonexistent suggestion. Yet he implies his own loss of control, stating, “But she was made for nothing but a bait / To train some hapless man to misery. / I am the hapless man that have been trained / To endless bondage” (IV.vii.135-38). Herod’s emotional destabilization only serves to emphasize early modern anxiety over

the reversal of the gendered hierarchy, in which the patriarch finds himself subjected to his wife's real desires and Salome's illusory constructions. As this thesis's previous chapters have shown, if a person fails to fulfill his/her role, then such a discontinuity threatens to expose the hierarchical performance as inadequate. Thus, Herod finds his right to condemn subordinates challenged, since even he falls short of the sovereign ideal. To account for this limitation, the ruling system rests on the social impetus to follow tradition and obscure the bonds that secure relations.

As a way to ensure a subject's inferior position, the patriarchal structure constrains the female characters' ability to determine their identities and protect against invasion. However, the need to categorize these feminine subjects indicates the need for imposed restraints. Underneath the image of a desired order, Cary's play depicts a paradoxical system in which dichotomies such as ruler/subject and husband/wife break down. Facing execution, Mariam states, "Had not myself against myself conspired, / No plot, no adversary from without, / Could Herod's love from Mariam have retired, / Or from his heart have thrust my semblance out" (IV.viii.9-12). Upon her husband's return, Mariam decides to attempt an isolated autonomy. Her previous description further illustrates the limitations of her actions, as she states, "For he by barring me from liberty, / To shun my ranging taught me first to range. / But yet too chaste a scholar was my heart / To learn to love another than my lord" (I.i.25-28). Mariam's only available means of preserving her virtue shows itself as a complete physical withdrawal, forcing her to conversely cultivate and contain her emotional self.

Her active removal from Herod's image of the ideal companion cannot protect her from the constraints that shape her perception. Even as she strives to fulfill the Renaissance image of the ideal chaste female, Mariam can only envision a limited freedom from patriarchal influence. She addresses her changing reaction to news of Herod's death with the words, "Aye, now mine eyes you do begin to right / The wrongs of your admirer and my lord" (I.i.67-68). Cary shows her automatically defining herself as tied to the husband she wishes to free herself from. Ideologically merged with the realm's representative, Mariam possesses no means of separating herself from Herod's identity. Yet she may alter the representation Herod tries to enforce upon her, exposing Herod's own lack of autonomy in his interactions with subjects. Accordingly, Mary Beth Rose proposes that "*The Tragedy of Mariam* argues unflinchingly that in the world of the play there is not now nor ever has been any coherent principle of legitimacy that the patriarchal family or state could honour and on which they can depend" (211). Herod represents the sovereign who displaces his identity upon a prescribed performance in false accord with reality, not understanding that absolute patriarchal rule cannot regulate another into a mere concept. He fails to obtain complete control over his wife and subjects because he depends on their acknowledgment of him as the realm's patriarchal figure. As a result, the basis of his authority begins to wear away under an onslaught of conflicting behaviors. Constabarus, in his anger over Salome's betrayal, reflects Herod's vulnerable position when he defines women as "the wreak of order, breach of laws" (IV.vi.54-56). He promotes a gendered belief that a wife gains her essential identity through her relation to her husband, but this understanding proves flimsy under Salome's

efforts to defy the performance defining their combined social position. Manipulating the given order for personal satisfaction, Salome refuses to be trapped by the dehumanizing idealization used to destroy Mariam. Over the course of the play, Salome stands as the overt representative of a disorderly femininity patriarchal authority struggles to contain; nevertheless, her perceived support of the system implies her necessity to it.

The Tragedy of Mariam suggests that a sovereign participating solely in the confirmation of his established beliefs ironically leaves himself vulnerable to suggestion. By placing a fragmented and chaotic entity in the central position of power, Cary comments on the system of rule that creates an absolute patriarch unable to differentiate between enactment and reality. Herod cannot recognize Salome's performance because he actively participates in limiting his awareness. In discussion over his wife's fate, Herod tells his sister, "For hadst thou not made Herod unsecure / I had not doubted Mariam's innocence, / But still had held her in my heart for pure" (IV.vii.158-60). Salome plays on Herod's private fears, driving him to forgo his love for Mariam in a quick response to her constructed infidelity. Because Salome confirms a venue of action that seems able to insulate Herod from exposure, whether from personal and public censure or emotional weakness, she modifies the ruling performance in order to protect her desires from Herod's infringement. Her management of Herod's impassioned state further highlights the sovereign as a "destructive and intrusive 'other'" (Introduction 20). Having shaped his identity to fit the role of the realm's undisputed representative, Herod's attempts to reassert "the doctrine of divinely ordained patriarchal absolutism" (Raber 332) nevertheless foreground his need for temporal relationships. Here, Herod's

own isolation as a patriarchal ruler works against him, as he relies on filtered interaction to reaffirm his actions. With the news of Mariam's death, he asks, "You dwellers in the now deprived land, / Wherein the matchless Mariam was bred, / Why grasp not each of you a sword in hand, / To aim at me, your cruel sovereign's head?" (V.i.172-75). At the play's end, Herod glimpses the damage he creates by capitulating to his and Salome's personal vendettas. He estranges the realm from its moral center, distorting his subjects to fit a social order that subsumes private will. Identifying himself as the source of transgression, Herod's words suggest that the denial of an internal identity at odds with his social framework limits himself and his subjects to self-deception. Significantly, his final desire to "die and find a grave" (V.i.253-54) comes after the realm's mutilation, which Herod cannot rectify no matter how much he attempts to reinforce its unity. When set against the backdrop of early modern absolutism, Cary's utilization of "the Renaissance representation of the tyrant brings into question the fixity and coherence of the sovereign self" (Bushnell 58). Her patriarchal figure's overwhelming emotional state establishes him as a fragmented and unstable king unable to close himself off from the influence of those people around him. Moreover, he serves as a caution against the potential effects of alienating oneself from subjects' desires and motivations.

Depicting domestic strife as an integral element of Herod's court, Cary addresses the monarch's internalized conflict. This system of rule attacks bonds between subordinates that may challenge the given head's authority, with the intention of overshadowing the ruler's inadequacy. Herod's increasing feminization marks him as dangerous, his emotional outbursts and irrationality becoming credible reasons for

censure. Additionally, in his reactions to the perceived betrayals, he exposes himself as dependent on the accepted marginalization of his subjects, devoid of autonomy because they must also actively incorporate themselves within the “king’s two bodies.” Driven by this impetus to accede to patriarchal primacy, Alexandra turns against her maternal bond with Mariam and “upon her daughter did loudly rail” (V.i.36). Herod’s position deprives the women of the power to claim their familial bond and preserve it against the king’s influence. Alexandra must be driven to deceive herself, betraying the ties that construct her identity in order for Herod to contain her. By doing so, he avoids revealing the malleability of a performance that may bend to his own whims. On the overall presence of right to power in Cary’s work, Rose writes, “The maternal characters in fact seal the negative cases the play makes that all authority is politically fragile, morally and emotionally tainted and bordering on futility” (213). Herod’s imposition of power diminishes the family, degrading the very construct upon which the kingly ideal rests. Preserving divine right to rule, the ruling ideology posits the family as an inherent system of relations that represents the desired social order. Herod’s influence destroys this order, as his irrational actions force men and women to either compromise their identity or face the label of deviant entity. Alexandra attacks her daughter because she seeks to preserve her limited power under Herod’s rule. Finding her daughter cast out of Herod’s favor, Alexandra reacts to the impetus to disassociate herself from her kin. Nuntio reports, “She said she shamed to have a part in blood / Of her that did the princely Herod wrong” (V.i.43-44). A continued alliance with Mariam would implicate Alexandra in her daughter’s disordered behavior. Once willing to foster her children’s connections (I.ii.89-

112), Alexandra serves as one example of the alienation patriarchy depends on to keep subjects focused on the centralized entity. On the other hand, Constabarus displays the consequences of adhering to the bonds established through loyalty. Refusing to “wrong the sacred name of friend” (IV.vi.9), Constabarus, like Mariam, attempts to preserve his moral self. His tragedy occurs because he is unwilling to demean the tenets that make up his personal and political morality. An ideology which casts doubt on “the legitimacy of private thoughts and feelings” (Richardson 25) transforms a person’s constructed self into a being continuously distorted, transformed to fit the changing whims of an absolute king.

For Elizabeth Cary, Catholicism offered a way to preserve private body and maternal ties. Yet her play touches on an awareness that the increased incorporation of Protestantism under Jacobean rule diminished this already limited venue of authority. Under the dictate of absolute rule, men and women lived ostracized from each other, with the patriarchal figure determining the behaviors of his disenfranchised subjects. Cary’s play thus creates a world at odds with “providence...since Salome not only survives her brother’s reign of terror, but also engineers the execution of the comparatively innocent Mariam and the Sons of Babas” (Beilin 143). Like the other two playwrights of this study, Cary reacted against a reality which enforced an obscured understanding of the machinations that secure position. Such a world drove its subjects to reject fragments of themselves, estranging undesired attributes like femininity and weakness and banishing them within those people deemed inferior. Furthermore, despite societal dependence to assert order, homosocial bonds weakened and broke in a kingdom assaulted by a king’s

unbounded power. The realm emerging from this instability is one transformed into a performance forcibly devoid of meaning. Other than the association granted through a personally and politically vulnerable sovereign, subjects found themselves unable to construct identities separate from expected roles. These roles, as in the case of Mariam and the Duchess, were at times ideologically unattainable, and they demanded of their subjects a dehumanizing performance devoid of the flaws that make a person human.

CONCLUSION

“Well, men are only men. That’s why they lie. They can’t tell the truth, even to themselves.”

-Rashômon, directed by Akira Kurosawa

This thesis sprang from the desire to explore some of the illusions that maintain social interaction. The works by Marlowe, Webster, and Caryl all touch on the internalized need for social realities to operate on an assumption of fixed selves, in which the process of marginalization is ignored in favor of a naturalized, but ultimately insubstantial, performance. As a result, human beings, whether in the past or in our present, live without full knowledge of the connections that make up self-definition. The subject’s need to live within ideals of order, to create an essentialized and desired state of being, insulates him or her from the potential of a chaotic existence. However, the process through which the early modern social world guaranteed security led to the exploitation of sovereign and subjects. The imposition of a limited structure on personal and political bodies denied new ways of perceiving the self in relation to others.

Delineating association in a way similar to that of the sovereign/subject relationship, gendered differences also create a naturalized alienation. Adherence to sexual difference supports the enactment of an ordered society, even as its subjects suppress recognition of the marginalized other. In effect, the gendered hierarchy substantiates difference and assures the patriarchal subject a performative authority. Reinforcing and shaping political subjectivity, gender provides a means to study the

sovereign subject and its impact on the temporal ruler and his/her people. On the impetus to conform to a gendered hierarchy, Judith Butler writes the following:

Gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis; the tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of those productions – and the punishments that attend not agreeing to believe in them; the construction ‘compels’ our belief in its necessity and naturalness. (190)

By promoting a means to relegate interactions, both sovereign and gendered ideals threaten to isolate and constrain people from forging meaningful relations. Instead, characters who fail to mediate their affections through public expectation find themselves rewritten into irrational subjects whose corruptive influence necessitates their purge from the realm.

My focus on three early modern tragedies stems from the dilemma of the stunted subject. Unable to claim a personal identity, this subject relies on a performance that only secures a semblance of his/her significance within the realm. These tragedies reflect and play out recurring anxieties about an overwhelming marginalization that consumes autonomy. The reigning structure cancels out the ability for effective action, and the tragic characters represent the system’s failure to incorporate new modes of interaction. Lynne Enterline locates the foundation of character torment in “a loss of a sense of personal agency in language, a loss of ‘voice,’ a loss of reference, a loss of the capacity to distinguish between literal and figurative senses, and overall, a loss of a sense of authority over one’s own discourse” (6). As the represented worlds descend into disorder,

the patriarchal characters can no longer seamlessly project their desires onto another. Self-definition depends on strife and alienation, the patriarchal ideal setting the people in power against their subjects. Even as none can perceive of themselves without this contrast, they strive to insulate their identities from alleged transgressors. The anxiety that generates acts of imprisonment and execution derives from the compulsion to contain, and then purge, disparity. Unable to realize the autonomous self, the early modern world finds in its connected web of relation its weakness.

At the end of both *Edward II* and *The Duchess of Malfi*, a kind of order is restored. The various sources of transgression face destruction, replaced with new rulers young enough to be molded to fit the sovereign ideal. Preceded by a range of turmoil and violent deaths, uncertainty lingers in these endings, but *The Tragedy of Mariam* explicitly shuts down hope for a new future. Instead, Herod waits for death, having symbolically killed a part of himself with his wife's execution. His utter desolation reflects the cycle of violence from which he cannot break, one which will continue in recorded history with Herod's execution of Mariam's sons (Beilin 145). Cary's play ends by establishing the futility of Herod's struggle to rectify the problems perceived within his kingdom. His realm hinges on a delusion of order, as it depends on an implicit enemy within himself that he must repress. Any persons who deviate from their expected roles under him transform into enemies of the realm. Through Herod, Cary suggests that such divergence is necessary, and the sovereign's expectation to eradicate dissention proves the root of public and personal unrest. The resulting reality turns its inhabitants against themselves and the people around them. This encompassing alienation ironically secures subjects'

dependence on the patriarchal absolutist. Even the sovereign must align him/herself with the idealized image of divine rule. Cary's play provides a lens through which to view James's rule, for this principle applies to early modern history as well as its literature. James insulated his predilection for favorites with his representation as the realm's husband, but he nevertheless incited anxiety over the uncertain repercussions his inclinations could have upon himself and his subjects. The works studied in this thesis expose this fear through crises of rule, as the limits of discourse hinder the characters from incorporating new forms of self-definition. They ultimately regress into binary systems, the moment of disruption contained once more within a shallow performance of difference. Thus, despite Elizabeth's potential as an alternative ruler, each play has to end in tragedy.

The ruling paradox confines sovereign and subjects to a limited spectrum of self-awareness. Even Elizabeth, as a monarch able to manipulate access to her private and public bodies, cannot transcend the integrated compulsion that secures the structures shaping social perception. No matter the system, gendered and hierarchal confusion creates panic because it allows an element of uncertainty into an idealized, naturalized order. In accordance with this dilemma, the patriarchal imperative to marginalize women and feminized emotions arises from more than a projected designation of disorderly passion. The feminized subject also provides a lens through which sovereigns can perceive their vulnerability, for social position rests on a manufactured hierarchy of rule and subordination. The flexibility characterizing Elizabeth's system of representation provides a starting point from which these playwrights begin to interrogate their accepted

realities. However, they cannot break free from the binary restraints that govern the patriarchal system. They must rather subvert the early modern enactment from within, utilizing the theatrical traditions of tragedy and tyrannical rule to underline the unsustainable nature of sovereignty.

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