General Introduction.

i. “To make present what is absent”: Gender Studies and Historical Interpretation.

In an essay written in 1980, Sandra Gilbert addresses the issue "What do Feminist Critics Want?". Echoing Adrienne Rich's well-known statement that feminist criticism involves the act of "re-vision…of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction" (1972, 18), Gilbert concludes that gender studies are characterised by a "revisionary imperative" (Gilbert, 1992, 31). In her vision, gender studies are concerned with the practice of rereading the past and its texts from a gendered perspective, by focusing on the representations of women in these documents. One of the activities resulting from this feminist critique of the images of women in a wide range of cultural expressions was the unmasking of gender stereotypes as social constructs rather than naturally given. Awareness that gender images are socially constructed, that images can be replaced and re-presented by others, was further fuelled by postmodern thinking. Language came to be seen as that which constitutes a gendered identity, the body being inscribed by gender discourses which were related to a particular sex. Thus, by the 1990s, the feminist critic Judith Butler formulated the insight that a gendered identity is "asserted through a process of signification" (1990, 143), that "assuming' a sex" is like "a speech act" (1993, 34), and that the body is primarily discursive, for even "the body signified as prior to signification is an act of signification" (1993, 30). Her comments that identity and the body are constructed through discourse, and that assuming gender can be defined as adopting a particular persona, imply that gender operates as a consciously or unconsciously assumed discursive representation.

As Elaine Showalter has argued, "feminist criticism can be divided into two distinct varieties". Apart from the feminist critique which concentrates on "woman as reader" and the images and stereotypes of women in literature" there is a second type of feminist criticism which is concerned with "woman as writer-- with woman as the producer of meaning" and "with the history, themes, genres, and structures of literature by women" (1992a, 128). Academics who undertook this practice of gynocritics often brought texts by women to the attention of a larger audience, working their way through archives to take women's writings out of the closet of forgetfulness. As a consequence of feminist critics' efforts to uncover this part of cultural history, the story of Western culture began to undergo some revision. Feminist scholars working in the

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1 See also Kolodny, 1992, 59.
field of history, who studied women's lives and their cultural expressions, remarked that it was possible to come up with different narratives of the past from the historical "reality" that had always been taken for granted. Challenging "the male-dominated scholarly tradition that controls both the canon…and the critical perspective that interprets the canon for society" (Tompkins, 1992, 82), they proposed an alternative cultural history and a newly extended canon which included significant numbers of women writers.  

Naturally, feminist criticism from the last thirty years has left its stamp on the area of English Renaissance and Restoration studies. Scholars such as Carol Hansen, Lisa Jardine and Catherine Belsey published studies of the representations of woman in Renaissance and early Restoration England. Margaret King, Suzanne Hull and Jean Howard broke new ground by mapping out the social position of Englishwomen in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century. In addition, Margaret Hannay, Nancy Cotton and Barbara Lewalski, among others, studied the cultural expressions by Renaissance and early Restoration Englishwomen in a wide range of genres, such as poetry, drama, and letters. Anthologies consisting of diverse writings by women, such as Betty Travitsky's *The Paradise of Women* (1981), were published, as well as modern editions of texts by individual women, such as Margaret Ferguson's and Barry Weller's edition of Elizabeth Cary's *The Tragedy of Mariam* (1994). Thus, the previously forgotten cultural productions by women became available to present day readers.

At the same time that feminist criticism began to revise and extend the perspective and methodology that had so far been used in Renaissance and Restoration studies, New Historicism also made a great impact on research carried out in this field. Resisting the idea that "a single correct view" (White, 1987, 47) of the past can be given, and refusing to grant privilege to any one of the range of possible narratives that can be told about the past, the New Historicist movement bore out the notion that history and literature are equally textual. Consequently, history and literature were no longer regarded as the binary opposites of fact and fiction, and literary texts were to be inserted "alongside other textual remains" (Jardine, 1995, 289). As a consequence, the once distinct disciplines concerned with analysing early modern England began to overlap. Literary critics started to study other discursive cultural expressions in relation to literary writings, while historians came to consider poems, romances, novels and drama in relation to historical documents. Furthermore, the fields of Renaissance and Restoration studies came to be marked by a strong alignment between New Historicism and Feminist Criticism, each theoretical movement influencing the critical perspective and objectives of the other. As Judith Bennett alleges: "Some of our greatest feminists have found inspiration

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2 See also Robinson, 1992, 117.
and support in history…and some of our greatest historians have been motivated, at least in part, by feminism" (1995, 251).

Nevertheless, in the area of Renaissance and Restoration studies the relationship between New Historicism and Feminist Criticism has always been rather tense. As Katharine Eisaman Maus states, the hostility between the New Historicists as "the power people" and Feminists as the "gender people" (1995b, 404) has been a common phenomenon in the past. David Bevington refers to the relationship between New Historicism and Feminist Criticism as an "uneasy alliance" (1995, 307), because New Historicists have tended to "marginalize gender issues" (1995, 311) when relating Renaissance literary texts to historical documents. Furthermore, New Historicism appeared to consider history mainly in public terms, and to focus on male canonised texts rather than writings by women. This tendency to neglect women's history, women's writings and gender issues did not prove to be the only area of difference between the two critical schools. It is essentially valuable that New Historicism's acknowledgement of multiple narratives has cleared the way for a recognition of differences among women upon grounds of class, race and sexuality. As Jean Grimshaw points out, New Historicism has shown "how traditional emancipatory theories have been blind to their own dominating and oppressive tendencies" (1993, 56). However, in emphasising a multiplicity of possible narratives, New Historicism also denies the existence of an essentially female identity and thus problematises one of the main objects of feminist criticism, namely the establishment of a coherent female tradition. In thus criticising the category "woman's writing", New Historicism threatens to break down the separation between a man's and woman's culture that feminists maintain, and questions the male-female difference on which feminist theories are based. Besides, New Historicism's implication of the diversity of texts suggests that one stock feminist narrative of "oppression" cannot be told either. As this narrative of oppression has been the drive behind all women's movements, this challenge to a common "history" undermines the possibility of one woman's front against male authority. In addition, although on the one hand new historicism supports feminism by its resistance to the idea of "a single correct view" (White, 1987, 47), on the other hand its refusal to grant privilege to any of the possible narratives that can be told, means that it denies feminism a status as a more valid account. The fact that New Historicism considers feminist criticism and women's history one among many other stories is at odds with most feminists' belief that their interpretations are more valuable, because they aim at raising the reader's consciousness of how oppression operates and thus can "provide the conditions for changing...culture" (Fetterley, 1978, 497).
Despite the problems that feminist critics have had with the aims and methodology of New Historicism, several scholars working in the field of English early modern studies have attempted to bridge the gap between both critical approaches by outlining the ways in which feminist critics can refine their methodology through New Historicism.

Elizabeth Cary's *The Tragedie of Mariam* suggests that hearing "a tale with ears prejudicate...spoils the judgement, and corrupts the sense" (II, i, 401-02). The statement expressed by the tragic chorus can be applied to feminist critics who run the risk of having their judgements of early modern texts and contexts spoiled by their modern and postmodern perspectives. Maus points to the benefit that feminist critics may draw from the insights gained and voiced by New Historicists in relation to the practice of historical interpretation. As Maus suggests, feminist academics who work in a field like Renaissance studies have recently come to realise that the interpretation of early modern texts is to some extent uncontrollable and irretrievable, due to the historical gap that exists between their own critical practice and, for example, seventeenth-century documents. Therefore, critics are increasingly aware of their own historical perspective in approaching a text from a different period, embracing different cultural values and norms. As she contends, "a culture's intellectual equipment, doctrinal alliances, and religious commitments provide it with the lenses through which it sees the world, and the language with which it apprehends itself", so that "identifying what constituted the cultural categories of those people in whom we are most interested" (1995b, 408-409) becomes essential. Maus implies that feminist critics often apply essentially twentieth-century terms to texts from the early modern period when these concepts did not yet exist.

Maus’s views can hardly be refuted, in particular when one considers the term "representation" that has played and still plays such a prominent role in cultural-historical research. Feminist critics working on early modern England are concerned with "representations" of the past, a word signifying to "make present what is absent", and "to a large extent dependent on context and tradition or even simple convention" (Ankersmit, 2000, 148, 151). It logically follows that the past that we seek to investigate is non-existent, until the moment in which we seek to recover it, in forms of expression which are "enclosed within itself...by representational habit and tradition" (Ankersmit, 2000, 158). In other words, it is suggested that it is impossible for twenty-first-century critics to represent an absent past, traces of which only survive through discursive remainders "as it was". At the same time, this awareness of the historical gap between the past that feminist critics study and their own historically determined methods and discourses of representation means that their use of terms developed by gender studies, such as "feminist" and "patriarchal", becomes problematised,
since these are essentially twentieth-century terms. How, then, can the feminist academic project still be legitimised when its discourses fail to represent the past on its own terms? How can we achieve a methodology that enables us to discuss, for example, Renaissance and early Restoration England from a gendered perspective while securing an extent of historical correctness?

Feminists like Maureen Cain have tried to find a way out of the dilemma between the desire to read texts from a feminist perspective and the non-existence of terms like feminism in the early modern period, by opposing the Foucauldian idea that all social relations are contained by discourse. As she argues, there may be experiences which, though they "have not as yet...been formulated in discourse" (1993, 94), may nevertheless exist. This would imply that what we now call feminist ideas were already present in the past, but had not yet been actualised in language. Although this is an interesting way in which to solve the issue of the authority of feminist reading, this theory will be hard to prove, as information from the past always comes to us indirectly, through texts, which we often tend to read from our own vantage point. A suggestion for a feminist critical methodology, which may ensure a more historically justified reading of the past is made by Maus. Aware of the discrepancy between our own critical discourses on the one hand, and English Renaissance world perceptions on the other hand, Maus proposes a way to sidestep the danger of imposing our contemporary perspective on Renaissance texts too forcibly. This method is to read Renaissance text in relation to a great number of other texts from the same period:

the effect of exposing myself in an almost random way to hundreds of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century texts gave me a sense of how little I knew about the period, how my sense of early modern England had been determined by my own, and other people's research project. (1995b, 413)

In Maus's view, "never to stop reading" (1995b, 404) may serve as the means to become aware of the historical difference between herself and the texts that she analyses. Maus's strategy of contextualisation, which she has derived from New Historicist critical practices, appears to make gender studies in relation to early modern writings feasible while the historical difference between the critic and the text remains intact. Reading seventeenth-century English texts in relation to other texts from the same historical context may indeed be the proper way to discuss and analyse gender constructions in the early modern period. It helps to avoid resorting too often to twentieth-century feminist critical discourses. Obviously, feminist criticism is an essentially modern phenomenon. However, while an interpretation of early modern texts on twenty-first century terms cannot be completely avoided, it can at least be minimised by by
listening to the early modern voices speaking to us from texts: by studying early modern writings alongside one another and by mapping out early modern discourses in detail.

ii. “Maides must be seene, not heard”: Recovering the Silenced Female Voice.

That it is essential to remain conscious of the historical difference between our twenty-first-century, gender-oriented vantage point and the past that we investigate, is revealed when one considers the following statement by an anonymous English Renaissance author: “Maides must be seene, not heard, or selde or never” (quoted in Krontiris, 1992, 5). In most Western present-day cultures women enjoy the freedom to speak their minds, address public audiences, to write down their thoughts and have them published without irrevocable damage to their reputations as women. By contrast, in Renaissance and early Restoration England women were commanded to observe silence, and to occupy their time with the needle rather than the pen. For sixteenth- and seventeenth-century women an enormous conflict existed between speech and sexual purity, since women who spoke up in public were considered to make themselves sexually available, displaying themselves in order to attract sexual attention. Likewise, as will be discussed in the first chapter of this study, women who expressed themselves through writing were described as prostitutes.

Considering the social condemnation that ensued from taking up the position of female author, it could be suspected that Virginia Woolf was right when she concluded that there were no seventeenth-century English women writers: "a highly gifted girl who had tried to use her gift for poetry would have been so thwarted and hindered by other people… tortured and pulled asunder by her own contrary instincts" (1945, 15). However, research carried out over the past thirty years, which has led to the (re)discovery of texts produced by numerous Renaissance and early Restoration women authors, proved Woolf's supposition to be too negative. Despite the social restrictions on female utterance, as well as the limitations placed on woman's education, a number of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century women tried their hand at writing.

The contradiction between the dominant social discourses which discouraged female utterance, and the fact that Renaissance and early Restoration women took up the pen raises a lot of questions. How did these women overcome their cultural silencing? Did the discourses which circulated in society in Renaissance and early Restoration England offer women any potential to resist the idealisation of silence as a mark of appropriate femininity? How did these women manage to create an authorial persona when social discourses denied them such a
position? How did they represent the female speaking subject who transgressed the gender norms just as they themselves did as writers? Did these women writers use any specific discourses to legitimise their "wicked" words?

iii. Tragedy and the Transgressive Female Voice.

Of all the different dramatic genres which were written and staged in England during the Renaissance and early Restoration, it is particularly interesting to study tragedy in relation to discourses on female utterance. One reason for this is that the concept of tragedy was often brought into relation with issues of gender and sexuality. For example, in an engraving from Robert Fludd's *Utriusque Cosmi Historia* (1617) the process of cosmic disintegration was represented as a series of concentric circles with man's genitals at the very centre. This particular engraving, which depicts tragedy on a world scale, represents sexuality as central to the process of cosmic collapse. This process, in turn, is at the centre stage of most tragic plots from the classics up to the seventeenth century which, according to Raymond Williams, are "rooted in a disorder" (1992, 66), and characterized by "instability" and "disintegration" (1992, 54). Considering the centrality of sexuality to the idea of cosmic disorder and destruction in the period, as Fludd's engraving suggests, it would be valuable to investigate the tragic genre in relation to the issue of woman's utterance, itself inextricably bound up with ideas of female sexuality.

Moreover, one of the qualities of tragedy, ancient and modern, is that it simultaneously explores a disturbance of social order, upheaval of values, and "those points where the conflicting forces must, by their inner nature, take action" (Williams, 1992, 35). Therefore, one could also anticipate the occurrence of subversive social discourses on woman's voices in Renaissance and early Restoration tragedies. Since one could thus assume tragedies to be dialogic in relation to gender issues, it becomes evident that the different discourses on speaking and writing women that one finds in tragedies from these periods need to be investigated in relation to other social expressions on the subject. There is another reason why it is vital to examine the discourses on women as speaking and writing subjects in Renaissance and early Restoration tragedies. In sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe both tragedy as a genre and the idea that a woman should "tip her tongue with silence" (Brathwaite, 1641, Tt1v) were conceptually linked to Eve's trespass which resulted in the Fall of man.

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3 See also Krontiris, 1992, 5.
4 The illustration is printed and discussed in Callaghan, 1989, 1.
of mankind. Eve's temptation of Adam, urging him to partake of her crime, was often cited and seen as ultimate proof that woman's tongue merely brought evil and misery, with the result that women were admonished to silence. Intriguingly, in his *Theatrum Mundi* (translation by John Alday, 1581), an important and frequently reprinted text on the social function of drama, Pierre Boaistuau discusses the concept of tragedy in relation to women, arguing that tragedy in general and human tragedy in particular could be viewed by observing the life of any woman. In his opinion, just as tragedy in general results from sin, a woman's tragedy—her pain in labour and her infliction of mortality on the human race by giving birth—issues from her punishment as a daughter of Eve.\(^5\) According to Boaistuau, therefore, tragedy and suffering are linked to womanhood. Since discourses on tragedy and discourses on woman's voice were both rooted in narratives about woman's sinfulness in relation to the Fall, one could expect a significant relation between tragedy as a genre and the dominant and residual social discourses on woman's voice.

In his portrayal of "cosmic undoing", Fludd represents the male rather than the female genitals, thus assigning privilege to "the phallus as the… vulnerable centre of the universe" (Callaghan, 1989, 1). Interestingly, feminist critics have always argued that Renaissance and early Restoration tragedy was significantly more phallocentric than comedy of these periods. For instance, Lenz, Greene and Neely claim that in comedies "women are most often nurturing and powerful", whereas the women in tragedy "are often powerless", and "almost invariably…destroyed" (1980, 6). Similarly, Linda Bamber makes the point that "the sharpest contradiction of all" is between comedies and tragedies. The comedies depict witty and active heroines, whereas tragedies mostly stage evil creatures who are "failures as women" (1982, 2). The majority of the tragic plays written by male playwrights endorse the dominant semantic equation of woman's voice with sexual looseness, and, thereby participate in the cultural silencing of women. As Elaine Beilin remarks, one can speak of the "demonisation" of female "eloquence" (1987, 178), in that outspoken women are represented as immoral and sexually promiscuous in early modern English tragedies. Furthermore, tragedies from the period are invariably marked by a "discursive discontinuity" (Beilin, 1987, 178), because their confirmation of the code of feminine silence contrasts with the fact that female speaking characters do appear on the stage in these plays. Yet, the tragic women who assert their voices are almost always deprived of their discursive power in the course of the play. They frequently

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\(^5\) See Boaistuau, 1981, 113: "Car entre toutes les creatures que Dieu a crees, il n'y en a aucune subjecte a plus de miseres et infirmitez que la femme, specialement celles qui portent fruit/ car a peine ont elles un loys de repos l'annee qui ne soit tout confit en crainte, et continuel tremblement".
end up as the silenced objects of male signifying processes, so that the gender status quo is re-established.

Considering this phallocentric nature of many Renaissance and early Restoration tragedies, one would expect that taking up the genre of tragedy would have been difficult for women writers, because the generic conventions of characterisation, plot and tragic closure are would have forced them to identify against themselves. The association of female speech with wantonness in the tragic genre evoked an image of the speaking woman that women dramatists sought to avoid in relation to themselves as writers. How, then, did these women dramatists overcome the discrepancy between the fact that sixteenth- and seventeenth-century tragedies generally implied the silencing of women, and their own efforts to legitimise their self-expression in the face of social restrictions? This contradiction between the women dramatists' urge to create a socially acceptable voice, and the negative representation of woman's speech and writing in most tragedies from the period, leads one to wonder how these women constructed gender in their tragic plays. Did they rewrite the tragic conventions concerning speech and silence in order to make the genre more compatible with their interest in female utterance? And if so, what discourses did they adopt as the means to reformulate the tragic genre?

There was another reason why tragedy was problematic for the few pioneering Renaissance and early Restoration women who took up the genre. On the one hand, tragedy as a dramatic genre may have seemed attractive to these women writers, since using the dramatic mode afforded them the possibility of covering up their own assertion of voice. As Ros Ballaster contends:

> The act of female authorship in the drama need not, of course, be understood as necessarily an act of public language; the one figure who is emphatically not physically present on the stage in performance is the author herself, who appoints surrogates in the shape of actors to present prologues and epilogues on her behalf. (1996, 268)

On the other hand, as a dramatic genre tragedy was considered to be a more public, and hence more masculine genre, than, for instance, the letter, the religious confession, or the maternal legacy. Renaissance women who wrote or translated tragic plays often designed their tragedies as closet dramas, that is, plays which were not meant to be performed on the public stage but read out in the more private setting of the aristocratic home. Although these early English women dramatists attempted in this way to disguise the public nature of their writings, the genre of tragedy was nevertheless associated with the masculine, public sphere. The fact that Renaissance women writers and translators of tragedies ventured to try their hand at a
masculine genre, though presented in terms of the feminine privacy of the closet drama, raises a lot of questions. How did these first female English dramatists represent the speaking, maybe even outspoken, female character in relation to issues of sexuality? Did they confirm the dominant view that discursively active women are wanton in order to cover up their own transgression of feminine silence? Or, contrarily, did these women writers of tragedy display sympathy towards the discursively assertive female and challenge the prevailing gender norms in order to legitimise their own act of "public" speech? These questions are even more relevant with regard to the women writers of tragedy in the early Restoration period who were the first female English dramatists to display their tragic plays on the public stage. How did they represent speaking women, when their female characters actually raised their voices on the public space of the stage, and when these characters were embodied by actresses who spoke up in public? Did the introduction of actresses on the early Restoration stage make it easier for women writers of tragedy to represent discursively active women on the stage? Or did the entrance of actresses increase the anxiety they felt about their own public voice? How did the appearance of actresses in the theatres affect these women dramatists' depiction of speaking women in their tragedies?

The questions arising from the discrepancy between women dramatists' urge to express themselves on the one hand, and the cultural silencing of women in society and in tragedy as a genre on the other hand, underlie the investigation that I have carried out with regard to tragic drama written or translated by Englishwomen from approximately 1590 to 1675. From the range of issues raised above, I have narrowed down my field of research to three basic questions. According to Jeanie Forte, women dramatists tend to employ "strategies…found in the realm of discourse…which can operate to deconstruct the imbedded ideology" (1996, 21). In the light of Forte's statement, my first research question is: how did these women writers and translators of tragedy represent the speaking or writing woman, and to what extent was this depiction influenced by both the dominant discourses on woman's voice, and alternative discourses on woman's speech which developed in different layers of society? Second, how did these women dramatists seek to negotiate the contrary voices in their dramatic texts? In other words, how did they handle the contradiction between their desire to express themselves and legitimise female utterance on the one hand, and their need to create an acceptable voice and preserve the illusion of femininity on the other hand? Third, I investigate the consequences of these negotiations for the genre in which they took place. To what extent did the women writers' dilemmas result in a reconstruction of the genre with regard to the tragic conventions of subjectivity?
iv. Tragic Subjectivity: a Definition.

Obviously, the centrality of the term "tragic conventions of subjectivity" in this study gives rise to two other fundamental questions. How should we define the term "tragic subjectivity" and why is it important to consider the ways in which Renaissance and early Restoration women writers represented this phenomenon? With regard to the first question, subjectivity can be understood as the achievement of self-consciousness. Language plays a significant part in attaining subjectivity. According to Catherine Belsey the notion "subjectivity" can best be described as the ability "to speak, to give meaning" (1985, x), "to have access to signifying practice, to identify with the "I" of utterance and the I" who speaks" (1985, 5). Subjectivity is nevertheless constrained by a limited number of subject positions, yet subjects as agents may also challenge these. Belsey's descriptions of subjectivity help us to answer the second question, that is, why it is important to concentrate on tragic subjectivity in relation to women dramatists. Since subjectivity has to do with speech, and positioning the self in discourse, it enables an examination of the representation of the female tragic subject in view of the fact that women writers and translators of tragedy had a problematic relationship with discourse. However, just as the meaning of a concept changes over different historical periods, one might expect the idea of "subjectivity" to have had different senses in the past. As Katharine Eisaman Maus puts it, "Elizabethan and Jacobean models" of subjectivity may not be "identical to currently available paradigms, nor wholly alien" (1995a, 213). In other words, it is important to bear in mind that our current notions of subjectivity may differ considerably from the ways in which people in late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England experienced and envisaged a sense of subjectivity, and we have to be aware of the historicity of the term "subjectivity". In this respect, it is vital to consider early modern definitions of subjectivity, and those that scholars working in the field of Renaissance and early Restoration history and culture have suggested. Did late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century people think of themselves as acting and speaking subjects, and, if so, what qualities were regarded as marks of subjectivity?

In Francis Barker's view, a sense of subjectivity started to develop from the Renaissance period onwards. The transition from the Renaissance to the Restoration period was marked by an increasing sense of interiority and a gradual relegation of the body to invisibility. As he explains, there was a shift from "spectacular, public, corporal" punishment

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6 One of the first historians to pay attention to mankind's development of a sense of selfhood in Renaissance Europe was Jacob Burckhardt. See *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien*, 1919, chapters 4, 5.
of transgressors of social laws to a penalty aimed at the curing of a delinquent's soul which took place in the more private setting of "closed and silent" (1984, 11-12) prisons. This gradual disconnection of the body from public spectacle and punishment, hence from public life, resulted in a growing awareness that the self might be independent of society, instead of a site of social control. This awareness led to the conceptualisation of an interior self, that the "I" could see as different, sometimes even rebellious to, the environment. Moreover, this development of a sense of interiority was closely related to the idea that a person could exert control through discourse. For example, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century medical texts as well as portraits on the subject of anatomy display the function of discourse as the means to control the human body. In *The Purple Island or the Isle of Man* (1633), Phineas Fletcher comes up with a textual description of the human body, mapping out the body in text as the means to exercise control over it:

The whole body must be parted into three regions: the lowest, or belly; the middle, or breast; the highest, or head. In the lowest the liver is sovereign, whose regiment is the widest, but meanest. In the middle the heart reignes, most necessarie. The brain obtains the highest place, and is as the least in compass, so the greatest in dignitie. (20)

Similarly, Rembrandt's painting *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr Nicolaas Tulp* displays the anatomist's control over the body through the textual. The eyes of the scholars are not so much directed to the corpse that is being dissected, but focus on a text, which maps out the secrets of the human body, and exhibits the doctor's command over the meaning of the body. In sum, the "textualization" (Barker, 1984, 81) of the body that the painting portrays, makes clear that discourse came to take up a central position as a means to signify and control the outside world.

Intriguingly, the notions of an increasing sense of interiority and control also come up in definitions of Renaissance subjectivity by other scholars on the subject. For instance, Elizabeth Hanson declares that what was new in self-awareness in Renaissance England was "a paranoid recognition that interiority can give the subject leverage against his world" (1998, 16), arguing that a person might hide a secret "intent" or "will" in the interior (1998, 17). Furthermore, she claims that subjectivity was formed by "discover [ing] the interior reaches of another" (1998, 17), that is, by discovering the secrets hidden in the interior of another person's heart and mind, as a means of knowing and controlling them. Similarly, Katharine Eisaman Maus states that in Renaissance England tension arose because of a growing consciousness of people's inward nature as different from exterior appearance, and as being "beyond scrutiny, concealed where other people cannot perceive it" (1995a, 4). In other
words, the sense arose that a person's inwardness was uncontrollable, hence dangerous, because it might conceal matters like disobedience or treason. As a result, society became obsessed with trying to discover people's interiors by attempting to "gather[ing] and interpret[ing] evidence" (1995a, 107) of a potential will to transgress.

The concept of knowledge as control also makes up a major element of Catherine Belsey's description of Renaissance subjectivity. As she explains, the Renaissance marked a shift in perceptions of mankind's relation to God. Unlike the preceding periods, in which God was seen as the exclusive possessor of insight, and human beings as the ignorant, knowable objects that were subjected to God's omniscient gaze, in the Renaissance knowledge was no longer viewed as an exclusively divine prerogative. Man came to be regarded as "that which knows, in contradistinction to that which is known" (1985, 25), that is, as the knowing subject instead of the known object. Moreover, the concept of knowledge came to be increasingly defined in terms of knowledge of the world and the self, so that subjectivity was realised through self-reflection and self-representation. Belsey also points out that the emergence of the idea that mankind was a self-reflecting subject was bound up with issues of language. In the course of the late sixteenth century the role of language came to be perceived differently. In the Middle Ages discourse was mainly seen as a site of knowledge that originated from God and was beyond human control. Yet in Renaissance England language came to be thought of as the instrument of knowledge that empowered rather than controlled mankind.7

Thus, Renaissance subjectivity was inextricably connected with discourse, in particular with command over it, the possibility of creating meaning instead of being signified, as well as a sense of an interior self that the "I" can signify as different from the other.8 Furthermore, in Renaissance and Restoration England identity came to be perceived as something that people could to some extent control and define through language, in an act of self-fashioning, rather than as preordained. Selfhood was still regarded as either determined by God's predestination or, in a more pagan sense, by the astrological position of the stars. On the other hand, identity came to be considered as "to some extent malleable and manipulable" as well, "by means of the conscious or unconscious adoption of a certain role in imitation of a model" (Ottway 81).9 People identified themselves with Christ, according to the principle of Imitatio Christi,

7 See Belsey, 1985, 65.
8 John Lyons also claims that in Renaissance England subjectivity came to be related to language, as "the product of past encounters with others, including, crucially, past dialogic, interlocutionary, and collocutionary (or conversational) encounters" (1993, 14). Likewise, Susan Fitzmaurice argues that in the Renaissance subjectivity was seen as constituted by language, since the self came to be associated more with "self- theme" and "self-story", rather than rather than self-admiration, self-conceited" (2000, 19). Language came to be perceived as the tool of fashioning a self. See also Caroline Bynum Walker, 1982, 69.
associated themselves with biblical figures like King David, Martha and Mary, and the Holy Virgin, or cast themselves in the roles of people from antiquity, or heroes or heroines from romances. Thus, this self-fashioning of identity through discourse, involved a process of identification and role-playing. This makes clear that the discourse of Renaissance and early Restoration England was a medium that people could command in order to create a representation of themselves. They saw themselves as able actively to insert themselves in a particular position in language, defining their own meaning, and thus achieving subjectivity.

How can we apply the definitions of the Renaissance and early Restoration sense of subjectivity to tragedy? It must be noted first that speaking about selfhood in relation to drama suggests a contradiction, drama being concerned with the adoption of roles imposed by the director or playwright. However, it is possible to view the *dramatis personae* in tragedy as represented persons who are either successful or unsuccessful in attaining a status as subject. Considering Belsey's and Barker's description of subjectivity, in tragedies from the period a character could be seen to act as a tragic subject when he or she can express the self, can reflect upon the self, and is in command over the process of signifying the self. Hanson's and Maus's allegations that Renaissance and early Restoration subjectivity is based upon the ability to discover the secrets of the "other", and to possess interiority, can also be easily transferred to the genre of tragedy. In the light of their views, it might be suggested that the tragic subject is the character who is able to know the hidden intents that the other characters harbour in their minds, but who remains unknown to others when he or she does not wish to expose thoughts or feelings. Besides, concerning the concept of interiority, a character can be said to occupy the position of tragic subject when his or her knowledge of the situation runs parallel with the insight that the audience has at that moment, rather than that the spectators or readers know more than this character as an expression of dramatic irony.

In Renaissance and early Restoration England, the Aristotelian ideas about tragedy, as defined in the *Ars Poetica*, were very influential. For instance, in his *Defence of Poesy* Sir Philip Sidney proposes a tragic model which is built upon Aristotle's notions about time and place:

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9 For a discussion on the same subject, see Sawday, 1997, 30.
10 Sheila Ottway lists these models on which selfhood was based in Renaissance England. See Ottway, 1998, 74-90.
11 Ottway speaks of "the construction of the self as a work of art" (1998, 74).
12 For this part of my definition of tragic subjectivity, I am partly indebted to prof. Michael Dobson and prof. Zachary Leader (Roehampton Institute, University of Surrey, London) whom I interviewed on the topic of tragic subjectivity.
For where the stage should always represent but one place, and the uttermost time presupposed in it should be, both by Aristotle's precept and common reason, but one day, there is both many days, and many places, inartificially imagined. (1986, 521)

In his *Poetics* Aristotle emphasised the plot as one of the major constituents of tragedy: "plot is the basic principle, the heart and soul, as it were, of tragedy, and the characters come second" (1980, 28). Considering the major role of the plot in the Aristotelian definition of the tragic, that was often referred to in discussions on tragedy in early modern England, it is essential to extend our investigation of tragic subjectivity to the plot. In relation to the development of the plot, one could combine the notions of inwardness and control in order to view the tragic subject as the character who manages to push the plot towards the end that he or she desires. Keeping the plot that he or she has in mind a secret to others, a character manages to direct and manipulate the plot according to his or her plans, and thus exerts narrative control within the play. Thus, in researching tragic subjectivity in Renaissance and early Restoration plays, questions that must be asked include: which characters are in command over self-expression and the signification of the "I"? Which characters function as knowing subjects, and which as the known, controlled objects? To what extent do the characters exercise narrative control over the plot?

Throughout the ages the concept of "transcendence" has been mentioned by critics when discussing tragic closure. Aristotle was the first to bring up the idea of transcendence in his *Ars Poetica*, relating it to the concept of "recognition", which marks the tragic hero's "shift from ignorance to awareness" (1980, 36) in his last moments. Having been introduced by Aristotle, the term "transcendence" was taken up and defined by numerous theorists. Murray Krieger connects the term to the idea of the "tragic vision", which he calls a visionary, glorious insight as expressed by a "man [sic] only in an extreme situation" (1971, 774-775), through which he can rise above his suffering. Karl Jaspers talks about transcendence as "even defiance unto death in a hopeless battle against gods and fate", the capacity to "bear the unknown without question, and to endure it with unshakeable defiance", which he sees as "a movement toward man's [sic] proper essence" (1971, 776-777). As becomes clear from these

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13 The "Aristotelian ideal of the mean, which varies with the individual differences between human temperaments" proved "congenial to humanistic aspirations" (Ornstein, 1975, 40), because it sanctioned worldly ambitions and values.

14 The prologue to Chaucer's *The Monk's Tale*, *Canterbury Tales* provides a definition of tragedy that is very similar to Aristotle's view that the tragic plot should be concerned with the downfall of a man: "Tragedy is to seyn a certyn storie,/ As olde bookses maken us memorie,/ Of hym that stood in greet prosperitee,/ And is yfallen out of heigh degree/ Into myserie, and endeth wrecchedly" (Chaucer, 1977, 243). Similarly, Alexander Neville appears to have taken over his definition of tragedy from Aristotle in "Tragedy and God's Judgements" (1563), stating that the tragic plot should represent "the most unfortunate fall" of a powerful man who is led astray by sin" (125).
descriptions of the word "transcendence", the term can be defined in multiple ways in relation to tragedy. Yet, which definition of transcendence is most relevant when one wishes to analyse Renaissance and early Restoration tragic subjectivity?

Tragic closures are conventionally marked by the deaths of one or several of the major characters. This is particularly true for Renaissance and early Restoration tragedy which, according to Michael Neill, is characterised by an obsessive concern with death. As Neill states, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century tragedy offered a fantasy "to overcome…fear of erasure of identity, by representing death as a moment of distinction and self-assertion" (1997, 32). Since the annihilation of the self in death as well as the desire to overcome this erasure of selfhood are so central to the tragic plots written in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England, in my view, it is necessary to examine tragic subjectivity in relation to the issue of transcendence. Which characters are granted moments of transcendence before they die, by enjoying a moment in which they can signify and represent the self in a final act of self-assertion? To what degree do the characters retain control over their interior and representation in and after their passing away? To what extent do characters possess autonomy in, and authority over, their own deaths, as a last possibility to establish narrative control over their lives? Furthermore, are the characters given the possibility of surviving death, either through memorialising rites arranged by those who are left behind, or perhaps even as spectral presences who continue to haunt those on earth?

**v. Investigating "Wicked" Words.**

I will use all these research questions as a referential framework for exploring the representation of tragic subjectivity in plays by early modern Englishwomen. Chapter one consists of an analysis of the dominant ideology of female utterance in Renaissance and early Restoration English texts, an exploration of the manifestations of this ideology in society, as well as an investigation of ideological inconsistencies which opened up possibilities for resistance. The chapter serves as the means of clarifying the position of women who partly defied this discourse by taking up the role of actress or writer. In addition, it helps to explain and illustrate the condemnation of female utterance that one finds in tragedies by men and women from the period. Chapter two highlights the ways in which women who took up genres other than tragedy attempted to legitimise their transgressive voices by adopting and recontextualising current discourses which were associated with femininity. I investigate the creation of alternative, legitimising discourses by these women writers, highlighting the
discursive strategies used by female dramatists to make woman's self-expression more acceptable.

Subsequently, I shall proceed to study a wide range of tragedies by Renaissance and early Restoration male dramatists whose tragedies were published and performed, and who were therefore mainly responsible for the tragic tradition of that period. I will explore the representation of woman's voice in these tragedies, as well as the degree to which the female characters attain tragic subjectivity. Thus, chapter three constitutes an essential part of the framework required to analyse the tragedies by women in Renaissance and early Restoration England, since it contains an inventory of the tragic conventions of subjectivity in that period against which these women's representation of tragic subjectivity can be measured. By comparing the representation of female tragic subjectivity by male playwrights with the way in which women dramatists deal with the tragic female subject, women writers' recreation of the tragic conventions of subjectivity may be investigated.

Chapters four to nine constitute the main body of this study: the analysis of tragedies translated and written by Renaissance and early Restoration women. This main body has been divided up in three parts, related to three different periods: 1575-1642; 1642-1665, and 1665-1680. Between 1575 and 1660 woman's drama gradually developed from a private form which was not meant to be staged to drama written for the public stage. In order to emphasise the generic development within tragic drama by women, I have categorised their plays according to three important historical stages. Each of the three parts is preceded by a short introduction, which clarifies the context of women and drama in the given period. In each chapter I will investigate the representation of the female speaking subject in a tragic play by a sixteenth- or seventeenth-century Englishwoman. After a brief description of the author's own position as a female discursive agent, and an outline of the history of the text of her play, I focus on the tragedy itself. I examine the text of the play in relation to the discourses of the female voices which circulated in society in that period. Pointing out which strategies are used to legitimise her utterance, I then explore the ways in which these female dramatists' legitimisation of woman's voice resulted in a reconstruction of the tragic conventions of subjectivity. In analysing the text, I will pay specific attention to its performance context, and will compare it with the sources from which the playwright derived her subject matter, other similar tragedies written in the same period, and the work of female precursors. By thus discussing each play in relation to the other tragedies by women analysed in this study, the development and reconstruction of the tragic genre by female dramatists in the changing social contexts of the late sixteenth and seventeenth century will be traced.
The first play to be analysed is Mary Herbert Sidney's *The Tragedie of Antonie* (1595), translated from Robert Garnier's *Antoine*, but incorporating her own interpretation of the play. I will continue with the first original play ever to be written by an Englishwoman, Elizabeth Cary's *The Tragedie of Mariam* (1613), in which the issues concerning woman's utterance are the central theme. Subsequently, I will discuss Margaret Cavendish's tragedy *The Unnatural Tragedy* (around 1645), a play which was published but not performed at the time, and Katherine Philips's translation of Corneille's *Pompée*, which was staged in public theatres in 1662. Finally, I will discuss two tragedies by Restoration women playwrights who actually aimed their plays for the public stage: Elizabeth Polwhele's *The Faithful Virgins* (1670) and Aphra Behn's *Abdelaz'r, or the Moor's Revenge* (1676).

The analysis of these tragedies confirms Judith Bennett's view that:

> women have always been both victims and agents..... Women have not been merely passive victims of patriarchy; they have also colluded in, undermined, and survived patriarchy. (Bennett, 1995, 262)

These women dramatists were "victims" in the sense that society largely excluded them from language and subjectivity. Nevertheless, it became possible for them to assume the role of "agents" in that they did not submit to the silence that was imposed upon them, but created the possibility of becoming female writing subjects, showing that the tragic genre was "as practicable by a woman" (Aphra Behn, preface to *The Dutch Lover*, 1673). Although these women dramatists were "victims" in that they were confronted with a tragic genre which excluded or eliminated the possibility for female subjectivity, at the same time they performed the role of "agents" in relation to the genre, expressing their rejection of the "musty rules" (Aphra Behn, preface to *The Dutch Lover*, 1673) of tragedy. Thus recapturing these women dramatists' voices, once silenced and banished to oblivion, I hope to map out these women's active contribution to a process of cultural change that has often been neglected.
Part I. The Representations of Female Utterance in late Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-century England
Figure 1: A scold’s bridle (British Library).
Chapter 1. "Bashful silence is an ornament to their sex": The Desire for the Voiceless Female.

In *The English Gentlewoman* (1631), a book aimed at the "education of young ladies", Richard Brathwaite alleged:

It suits not with her honour for a young woman to be prolocutor...bashful silence is an ornament to their [woman's] sex. (Tt1r-v)

Brathwaite's statement illustrates the notion of woman's voice which dominated social conventions in Renaissance and early Restoration England. Whereas woman's silence was seen as a mark of proper feminine submissiveness and chastity, woman's speech was associated with lewd conduct. In this chapter I will discuss this social condemnation of female utterance. First I will illustrate the dominant ideology, and explain how these discourses which sought to silence women affected social practices and cultural expressions. I will do so by a close reading of fragments from sixteenth and seventeenth-century documents, such as conduct books, eulogies and reports, as well as by detailed descriptions of conventions from that period.1 Second, I will illuminate how the idealisation of the silent woman left its mark upon theatrical productions, leading to the exclusion of women actors in the Renaissance period, and the sexualisation and condemnation of female actresses during the Restoration. Third, I will explore the impact of the dominant gender discourses on literary production, focusing in particular upon the way in which this desire for the voiceless female affected women who attempted, by writing, to defy and transgress the culturally imposed silence.

1.1. "Never an unseemly word": Discourses on Female Utterance.

In his invective against the female sex, *The Arraignment of Lewd, Idle, Froward and Unconstant Women* (1615), Joseph Swetnam argues that, commonly, women are "subtle and dangerous for men to deale withall, for their faces are lures, their beauties are baytes, their looks are netts, and their wordes charmes, and all to bring men to ruine" (B3v). Furthermore, woman has such an insatiable lust that she "will paune hir honor to please hir fantasie" (C3v). Although Swetnam's writing was considered extremely misogynist, even in its own time, it clearly manifests the general fear of female sexuality which pervaded society in early modern England. Woman's sexuality was considered a potential threat to the gender hierarchy, as men were thought to be rendered powerless through woman's charms. The cultural anxiety for woman's sexuality did not
merely concern the order of gender, but the class system as well: the upper classes in particular feared that the frequency with which adulterous noble ladies gave birth to bastards born within marriage would subvert dynastic legacies and eventually lead to a disturbance of the class system. This general anxiety for women's reproductive and supposedly castrating power resulted in a social desire to restrain and control woman's sexuality. During Elizabeth I's early years on the throne, Parliament attempted to control even the young queen's sexuality by its recurrent insistence that Elizabeth should marry to settle the succession. Moreover, the tendency to constrain female sexuality is revealed by the appearance of conduct books, written by men and addressed to an audience of women readers. These conduct books strove to define the culturally "most desirable woman" (Tennenhouse and Armstrong, 1977, 5) by establishing the parameters of acceptable feminine conduct, and emphasis was laid on woman's need for chastity. For instance, in the earlier quoted The English Gentlewoman (1631) Richard Brathwaite admonishes his female readers to avoid any "scandal or blemish to their sex" (Ss2v). Likewise, in his didactic address to young women, The Woman's Glorie (1645), Samuel Torshell insists upon chastity as a quality that should be "proper to the woman's sex as flying to a bird" (G3v).

In sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century England, female sexual activity came to be associated with speech and writing. Shakespeare's Henry V (1600) depicts woman's initiation into sexual activity as the acquisition of a new language: Henry's courtship of the French Katherine is accompanied by the fact that she must give up her native tongue and learn a new language:


Moreover, the Renaissance humanist ideal of eloquence was often figured as a woman who is gradually exposed to the reader's gaze by the male writer's words. Thus, language was related to female sexuality, albeit in a passive, objectified sense. For example, in Sonnet 64 from Amoretti (1595), Edmund Spenser displays his poetic skills by elaborate descriptions of the female beloved's exterior, which are rooted in Petrarchan conventions. In doing so, he erotically unfolds her body to the reader: after focusing on his lover's "ruddy cheek" and her "snowy browes" (II 6-7), he moves on to full descriptions of the more intimate parts of her body, "her brest" which

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1 The term "dominant discourse" is derived from Showalter, 1992b, 263.
2 See Fissell: "Political stability rested upon women's sexual virtue, as adultery created wrongful heirs" (1995, 443); See also Kelly, 1984, 12.
3 See Neale, 1967, 124-27 and 148-51. This was probably due to an underlying apprehension that the queen might produce an heir who would be undesirable from a dynastic point of view.
4 See also Traub, 1992, 68.
5 According to Lorna Hutson, eloquence was often "figured as the analogical unfolding of a female body to
smells "lyke lillye see theyr leaves be shed" and "her nipples" which are "lyke yong blossomed jesamines" (ll 11-12). Thus, the woman's body is eroticised through language.

That female sexuality was often related to language is by no means surprising. The mouth producing language has always been considered to bear close resemblance to the "mouth" constituted by woman's sexual organs. Another reason for the common association of language and woman's sexuality can be found in the extreme popularity of the Eve myth in Renaissance and early Restoration England. The biblical narrative of Eve's temptation by Satan and man's fall which resulted from her persuasion of Adam to eat the forbidden fruit was often cited by writers of both religious and secular texts to demonstrate woman's innate tendency towards evil. The author of the *Schoolhouse of Women* (published between 1542 to 1571) dwells in detail upon how Eve "moved" Adam with her charms and words "first to consent" (1985, 153). This stress laid by many authors upon the link between Eve's words and Adam's temptation created a further, more general association between woman's sexuality and words.

Since the concept of language was so inextricably bound up with woman's sexuality at that time, the gender ideal of female chastity generated the widespread cultural demand that a good woman ought to be silent. This idealised figure of the silent woman comes up in a great number of cultural expressions produced from the mid sixteenth century until the 1690s; not surprisingly, it is particularly present in the above-mentioned genre of the conduct book which aimed to shape women's social identities. For instance, in *The Good and the Badde* (1615), Nicholas Breton remarks that a woman's silence is "a jewel unprizeable" (E2r). As the continent female body and the closed mouth became mutually replaceable signifiers, women were taught that in order to conform to the ideal of feminine chastity and not to arouse any suspicion of wantonness, they ought to be silent. By contrast, women who asserted their voices, in particular in public places, were considered to be sexually immoral, as they were thought to draw attention to their bodies by means of speech.

That woman's silence was thus regarded as evidence of chastity in Renaissance and early Restoration culture at large becomes clear from a close reading of some conduct books and eulogies published during this period. In the picture of the ideal woman that Breton draws in *The Good and the Badde*, the description of this woman's "unprizeable" silence is followed by a reference to her as a "turtle in her love" (E3r). This image of the turtle dove, the bird that

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6 As Peter Stallybrass argues, this coalescence of the mouth and woman's sexual parts characterised thought in Renaissance and early Restoration England, where the image of the chaste, "enclosed body" and "the closed mouth", the speaking mouth and the available body gradually "collapsed" (1986, 127). See also Patricia Parker who points to the common association between woman's corpulent bodies and an overflow of words (1987, 12).
remained faithful to just one mate throughout its entire life, signified sexual purity in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century thought. In Breton's text the patriarchal discourses of feminine chastity and feminine silence intersect.

Eulogies, written by men to commemorate recently deceased women, often contributed to the cultural ideology of the wordless woman by drawing an analogy between woman's silence and her chastity. In *A Christal Glasse, for Christian Women* (1591), in which he commemorates his deceased wife Katherine, Phillip Stubbes suggests a connection between the wifely qualities of moderated discourse and chastity. Having stressed the fact that Katherine "obeied the commandement of the Apostle, who biddeth women to be silent" (A2r), and never went "abroade with any, either to gossip or make merrie" (A2r), Stubbes subsequently highlights her chastity. He argues that his spouse lived "continently", that is, led a life of chastity, and emphasises that "there was never one filthy, uncleane, undecent or unseemly word heard to come forth of her mouth" (A2v). Stubbes thus associates a woman's chastity with a feminine modesty of speech, that is restricted to the private, domestic sphere.

The concepts of female chastity and woman's moderation of utterance becoming intertwined in Renaissance and early Restoration cultural expressions, woman's speech and writing were equated with sexual availability and promiscuity. Praising the silent woman for her continence, Nicholas Breton calls the word of a "wanton woman" a "charm" (E2v), thus associating the sexually immoral woman with a capacity for eloquence. In *The Arraignment and Burning of Margaret Fernseede*, a report of the trial and conviction of a woman who murdered her husband, the anonymous author portrays Margaret Fernseede as a wanton woman who "had ever since her marriage in most public and notorious manner maintained a young man with whom (in his view) she had often committed adultery" (1985, 354). At the same time Fernseede is portrayed as a woman who is very eloquent and wordy; someone who is "continually scolding" (1985, 355) and who is "well spoken, of fair delivery and good persuasion" (1985, 356). This association of lewdness and woman's speech which runs through the text is reinforced by the expression "courtesan like speeches" (1985, 354) which the author uses to describe Fernseede's use of language.

The attitude towards women who dared to raise their voices despite the cultural taboo on woman's public speech also reveals that woman's speech was equated with sexual immorality. At the time of the Civil War (1642-51), when the previously established social order fell apart completely, gender relations were subject to revolutionary changes. Women presented their petitions for a restoration of peace in the country and proclaimed their views on the war on the street in public demonstrations, thus intervening into the male domain of politics. Writers of that time
were usually extremely negative about these transgressive women, associating them with bawdiness. In one of the accounts of demonstrations by women petitioners at Westminster in 1643, in *Certaine Informations*, it was stated revealingly that: "many conceived them five or six thousand, some say 500 of them were whores" (quoted in Higgins, 1973, 92).

Furthermore, that woman's speech was seen as a mark of sexual promiscuity is revealed by the punishment reserved for women who asserted their voices in public. According to the Cheshire Quarter Sessions (1611) Margaret Knowlesley, resident of Nantwich, had shamefully slandered a preacher of God's word, Stephen Jerome, by accusing him of sexual harassment. A remarkable feature of Knowlesley's case is that whereas she was the supposed victim as well as the plaintiff, she was brought to trial and punished. This treatment indicates that woman's outspokenness about sexual assault was regarded as evidence of her own sexual guilt at the time. In addition, as Lynda Boose points out, the manner in which Knowlesley was punished for her "slander" is significant: Knowlesley was ordered to be slapped at the tail of the cart. Since, according to Boose, "the standard Elizabethan punishment for 'whores' was to whip them at the tail of the cart" (1995, 335), Knowlesley's punishment implies that society labelled her as a whore.

Margaret Knowlesley is by no means the only woman who was ordered to be whipped at the tail of a cart as a result of speaking in public. In 1655 Dorothy Waugh, who belonged to a Quaker congregation, was convicted for preaching in public in Carlisle. When she proved unrepentant, the mayor ordered punishment by the scold's bridle, "a heavy iron mask with three bars across the face and a large piece which, crammed into the woman's mouth, caused her great pain and made her incapable of speech" (Hobby, 1988, 38), a spectacle to be watched while in exchange for money.7 In my view, Waugh's case does more than reveal the cruelty used to keep woman within the bounds of silence. Having to undergo the same punishment as anyone who was regarded a whore and her body and shame being displayed in public in exchange for money, Waugh's fate presents another instance of the dominant cultural equation of the public female voice with sexual availability.

1.2. Woman's voice and the "meeting place for whores".

The social condemnation of the female voice in Renaissance England also clearly manifested itself in the exclusion of women from the acting profession before 1660. Although the actress

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7 For a picture of a scold's bridle, see illustration 1.
was a common phenomenon on the public stages of the European continent, this was not the case in England. Until the first year of the Restoration period, women were officially not allowed to enter the public stage. Female parts were acted out by so-called boy-actors, that is, young, immature men who impersonated women by dressing up in women's attire.

Several arguments can be brought forward to account for the fact that English Renaissance women were not permitted to perform on the public stage. For one thing, the theatre was envisaged as one of the most public places. Consequently, for women, acting on the stage implied that they had to raise their voices in public, hence, personify the socially condemned, sexually incontinent woman. This inappropriateness of acting for women was reinforced by the fact that in Renaissance England drama was essentially a verbal medium, so that acting was considered a form of oratory. Allowing women onto the stage would therefore entail that women would become strongly involved with the area from which they were socially debarred, namely language.

In addition, women's exclusion from acting can be explained by the fact that from the early Renaissance up till the early Restoration the Puritan antitheatricalists sought to discredit the theatre by describing it in terms of prostitution, believing that the theatre taught immorality, allures the senses and served as a "meeting-place for whores" (Howard, 1994, 75). For instance, in 1577 John Northbrooke claimed that the theatre may instruct the audience "how to play the harlots" (K2v). Writers of conduct books like Richard Brathwaite often drew an analogy between outspoken, wanton women and the theatre, suggesting that these women "demean themselves more like actors than civil professants" (Tt1v). As the theatre came to be associated with the image of the culturally feared lewd woman, and the wordy wanton woman in particular, women were commanded to abstain from presenting themselves at the theatre houses, not just as actors, but also as spectators. For instance, in *The Schoole of Abuse* (1579) Stephen Gosson pleaded against women's attendance at the theatre, since in that "market of bawdrie" (C2v) women would be symbolically whored, as the objects of the promiscuous gazing enacted by the men in the audience. In addition, the delay in introducing actresses on the English stage arose from an

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8 In Spain actresses were a common phenomenon on the stage by 1623, when the young English prince Charles visited Madrid. As can be read in Sir Richard Wynn's account of this visit: "The Players themselves consist of Men and Women. The Men are indifferent Actors, but the Women are very good...To say the truth, they are the only cause their Plays are so much frequented" (B1v).
9 See also Thompson: "Before 1660 there were no women, only 'women' impersonated by men on the English professional stage" (1996, 101).
10 As Stephen Orgel maintains, "the Renaissance actor did not merely imitate action, he persuaded the audience through speech and gesture" (1975, 17).
11 See also Howard, 1998, 83. Interestingly enough, Andrew Gurr points out that, despite the great number of commands directed at English Renaissance women not to appear at the public play houses, women attended performances in significant numbers, and that there were many ordinary citizens' wives among the female
anxiety that acting women would become involved in sexual liaisons, and consequently give birth to illegitimate children for which parishes would be responsible. In other words, women were initially banned from the stage due to the general assumption that women who raised their voices in the theatre would be sexually flagrant.

It was not until 1660, when Charles II, who had watched female actresses on the continent, came to the throne, that Englishwomen's acting on the English public stage became legitimised. Since they not only had to expose their bodies, but also raise their voices in front of a paying public, it is not surprising that actresses who took to the stage were associated with lewdness. The first female actresses who appeared on the public stage were viewed as sexually immoral and available. This becomes clear from the fact that they were not judged by their acting skills, but by their sexual attraction:

> Whether or not she exploited it off stage, the actress's sexuality—her potential availability to men—became the central feature of her professional identity as a player (Howe, 1992, 34).

As a result, these actresses' private lives, and in particular their love affairs, were foregrounded by critics. For instance, in *A Comparison between Two Stages* more emphasis is laid upon Anne Bracegirdle's sexual reputation than on her fame as an actress. When the two characters speaking in the dialogue, Sullen and Critic, discuss Bracegirdle's acting they refer to copulation rather than the enactment of roles on stage:

> Sullen: But does that Romantick Virgin still keep up her great Reputation?
> Critic: D'ye mean her Reputation for Acting?
> Sullen: I mean her Reputation for not acting: you understand me. (1702, 17)

That actresses were regarded as sexually available and promiscuous is also revealed by the fact that men could easily go behind the scenes where the girls were undressing, and that the female players were offered no protection against male assault. In fact, male visitors of the theatre would often pay to "chat with the actresses back-stage" (Bevis, 1988, 34), thus offering money in return for intimacy with the actresses in the same way as they would pay prostitutes for sexual spectacles (1987, 56-60). As Jean Howard argues, "the intensity of Gosson's scrutiny of the woman playgoer indicates to me that her presence in the theatre may have been felt to threaten more than her own purity, that in some way it put her 'into circulation' in the public world of Elizabethan England in ways threatening to the larger patriarchal economy" (1994, 224).

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12 See Shapiro, 1994, 189.
13 As Antonia Fraser alleges, before the day on which Englishwomen were first allowed to work as actresses, August 21st 1660, “women had been seen on the stage” in England, “but they had been foreigners, and, as such, highly suspect” (1984, 419).
14 As Elizabeth Howe put it: “Society assumed that a woman who displayed herself on the public stage was probably a whore” (1992, 32).
15 Likewise, in the case of Elizabeth Barry the critics and audiences were mainly interested in her affair with John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, with whom she had a child. See Howe, 1992, 31.
16 See Howe, 1992, 33: "regulations against backstage visitors were ineffectual".
services. This practice was often referred to in the epilogues of Restoration plays. For example, in the epilogue of Dryden's *Tyrannick Love* (1670) the actress Nell Gwyn alludes to the fact that the gentlemen in the audience will soon come to see her backstage to satisfy their lust: "Gentlemen, make haste to me, I'm sure ere long to have your company (K1v). In the epilogue of Nathaniel Lee's *The Rival Queens* (1677) even more explicit references are made to the sexual abuse of actresses by male members of the audience: "Our women who adorn each Play,/Bred at our Cost, become at length your prey" (L2v).

When actresses were admitted to the stage, there was a significant increase in parts for sexually available, immoral women as well as sexually titillating scenes, including crossdressing women and rape scenes. As J.H. Wilson comments, on the Restoration stage "an actress commonly bared her bosom and sometimes had to endure the lecherous laying-on of hands" (1958, 70) due to the increasing sexualisation of women characters. In the epilogues or prologues attached to plays women actors often responded to their sexualisation by the critics and audience, speaking lines which confirmed the stereotype of the actress as a prostitute. Nell Gwyn spoke in the epilogue of Dryden's tragedy *Tyrannick Love* (1670): "to tell you true, I walk because I dye…O Poet, damn'd dull Poet…So sensless! to make Nelly dye for Love" (K1v). The expression "dye", a well-known double entendre referring to orgasm, reinforces the image of Gwyn as the sexually available, lustful female that the audience and critics created.

1.3. Writing "wanton" words.

Although writing is a less direct medium of self-expression than speech, as a discursive form used by woman it was also equated with looseness and sexual incontinence. For example, in *The Mirrhor of Modestie* (1579) Thomas Salter proclaims that "there is no lesse daunger that they will as well learne to be subtile and shamelesse Lovers" if women become "connyng and skilfull writers"(C1v-C2r), thus equating woman's use of the pen with sexual immorality and a dangerous aptitude for seduction. By contrast, he sees less harm in teaching women how to read, as long as the books that they study prescribe a proper, feminine conduct: “...but I would have her if she reade, to reade no other bookes but suche as bee written by godlie fathers” (C3r).

Salter's attitude that women's education was to be restricted was by no means singular, but one adopted by most Renaissance humanists. As Margaret Hannay explains, it was commonplace to

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17 See Thompson, 1996, 102, and Howe, 1992, 43-57. Howe contends that the increase in rape scenes in Restoration drama resulted in the actress Anne Bracegirdle's specialisation "in having her virgin innocence brutally taken from her" (1992, 43).

18 Diane Purkiss defines writing as "a more mediated entry into the public realm" (1992, 140)
teach "women to read the words of men without teaching them to write their own" as "one effective means of silencing them" (1985, 8).

Like Salter, the author of *Asylum Veneris* (1616), Daniel Tuvil, links writing to lasciviousness by envisaging writing as a major threat to woman's sexual purity:

The pen must be forbidden them as the tree of good and evil, and upon their blessing they must not handle it. It is a pandar to a virgin chastity. (35)

In addition, this cultural association of woman's writing with wantonness was reinforced by the fact that the most public mode of writing, publication, was depicted in terms of a woman losing her sexual innocence. In late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century England publication was seen as a base and vulgar medium which disgraced the author, in particular if this writer belonged to the higher classes. Therefore, the most common means for the printer to ease the text into the public eye was to suggest that publication did not have full authorial consent. The impression was created that the writer's words were "snatched away from their producers and obscenely offered for sale to the public", and writers often represented their published text as a "ravished virgin" (Wall, 1989, 41),

Despite the widespread taboo on female self-expression, both in private and in published forms, some women boldly took up the pen instead of the needle in order to give vent to their ability and desire to write. Although the majority of lower- and middle-class women in early modern Europe remained illiterate, many upper-class women obtained some reading or writing skills from the Renaissance onwards.

Many noblewomen were familiar with literary forms and styles because of their role as patrons, that is, financial and social supporters of male authors who aspired to fame. The noblewomen at the court of James I's queen, Anna of Denmark, were very active patrons of the arts. Susan de Vere, countess of Montgomery, for example, lent her support to George Chapman when he translated Homer's *Iliad* and also patronised John Donne.

Moreover, it can be gathered that Lucy Bedford played a major role as a patron of poets and dramatists from the fact that Michael Drayton dedicated his works to her, and Ben Jonson offered her a copy of his *Cynthia's Revels* with a set of verses to her. David Bergeron identifies fourteen Renaissance women patrons of drama, among others Bridget Radcliffe and Lady Lucy Audley. The central function that many of these noblewomen had as patrons of letters created a setting in which these women developed a literary awareness, may have become inspired by the

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19 See also Wall, 1993, chapter 1 and 2; and McLuskie, 1996, 71.
20 See Cressy, 1980, 43.
21 See Krontiris, 1992, 22.
literary forms of their protégés.

The ideological discourses on the silent woman were far from consistent and implied a "double bind". Women from the upper classes were taught that silence was chaste, though they had to display the power of their families through speech and writing. Middle class women, who were expected to be assertive in the market, but silent at home, received contradictory messages as to whether and when they should remain silent or not. At the same time, the significance of the notion "silence" changed. Whereas silence was originally seen as the refuge of fools, or as a sign of powerlessness, under the influence of the Puritans and in the context of religious persecutions, it came to be identified with rebellion and the power to withhold information from oppressors. Silence becoming a tool of hidden, hence, dangerous rebellion, the female silence was no longer merely idealised. As Lear's apprehension of Cordelia's silence in King Lear reveals, the ideological discourses on woman's voice which circulated in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England held a paradox, in that the silent woman who is venerated is at the same time represented as a potential threat: "Nothing will come of nothing, speak again" (I, i, 92). As Luckyj argues, according to Renaissance and early Restoration beliefs, silence might contain a concealed rebellion, which is threateningly subversive in its elusiveness: "a woman who speaks allows herself to be known, hence controlled; by implication, the silent woman, though conventionally supposed chaste, confounds knowledge...hints at the hidden and perhaps even the bestial", and therefore may be "dangerously anarchic" (1995, 40-41).

English society's fear of the female silence which it so overtly venerated at the same time, is revealed by the way in which female silence is represented in a number of cultural expressions produced in the period. For example, in Ben Jonson's play Epicoene, or the Silent Woman (1610), Morose believes that he has just married a woman epitomising the feminine ideal of modest speech and silence, but finds himself betrothed to a most "manifest woman" who will soon prove to be his "regent" (III, iv, 39- 51). Epicoene's feminine silence was only a temporary mask "she" put on to hide an extremely rebellious nature. This shows that a silent woman could be dangerous, since she cannot be gauged, her dumbness shrouding her real nature. The fact that by the end of the play Epicoene proves to be a man impersonating a woman, instead of a real member of the female sex, makes it questionable if a silent woman could exist at all, or is just a

25 See Jones, 1977, 43.
26 See Ammusen, 1988, 119.
29 See also Luckyj, 2002, 61: "Speech allows men to appropriate women's inner space; silence excludes men even as it attracts them".
male fantasy. Likewise, in *The English Gentlewoman* (1641) Richard Brathwaite implicitly contradicts his statement that a woman's silence is the "ornament to their sex" (Tt1v), by insinuating that in relationships between men and women communication through speech is most desirable as a manner in which woman can be known and, consequently, contained:

> Without speech can no society subsist. By it we express what we are, as vessels discover themselves best by their sound. (Ss2v)\(^3\)

The ideology concerning woman's voice was thus not consistent. In some writings of the period, the admonishment to silence, directed to women readers, was personified by a female figure who persuades other members of her sex to hold their tongues. For instance, in *The English Gentlewoman* Richard Brathwaite argues that if the personification of "Decency" spots women who act wantonly and speak clamorously, she "labours to reclaim them: with amorous, but virtuous rhetoric" (Tt1r). Although Brathwaite distinguishes between the pure words spoken by Decency and the vileness of the unfeminine women, Brathwaite's text thus still includes oppositional discourses.

These contradictions and gaps within the dominant discourses on woman's voice offered the means for resistance, opening up possibilities for women who desired to express themselves through writing. Yet, despite the opportunities which these ideological incoherences created, writing remained extremely problematic for women. Since woman was culturally confined to the realm of silence, it was extremely difficult for a female author to find a persona and to create from a culturally non-existent subject position.\(^3\) Furthermore, having been excluded from language, and education in using it, women writers often exhibited a great sense of inadequacy. For example, in her preface to the *French Historie* (1589) Anne Dowridge belittles her ability to write poetry by requesting the reader to pardon her "want of learned Skill" (1986, 149). In one of her *Sociable Letters* (1664) Margaret Cavendish also denigrates her writing skills, alleging that she cannot write orations, because she knows "no rules in rhetoric", and because she wants "wit and eloquence" (B2v).\(^3\)

Besides, the general equation of woman's language with the loose woman also extended to the way in which women writers were perceived. The Beinecke Library at Yale holds a copy of Rachel Speght's *A Mouzell for Melastomus* (1617) that was annotated by a contemporary. In his profuse comments on Speght's writing that this presumably male author penned in the

\(^3\) In his treatise on the grounds of marriage (1642) Daniel Rogers similarly voiced the idea that speech was the "glasse to behold" a woman's mind in (quoted in Belsey, 1985, 34), and therefore the medium needed to know a woman by.

\(^{31}\) See Beilin, 1987, xx.

\(^{32}\) For further details about Margaret Cavendish's self-justification as a writer, see Wilcox, 2001, 210-13.
margins of her texts, he clearly evokes an image of the woman writer Speght as sexually profligate. In his comments on the appendix to the *Mouzell, Certaine Quares to the Bayer of Women to the Reader*, the annotator implies that Speght cannot be a chaste virgin because of her boldness of speech:

> You speak like a mayd, not like a a virgin. I am young sir and ascorne affection; 'um, 'um, 'um. (printed in Lewalski, 1997, 158)

Speght was by no means the only woman writer who was represented in terms of sexual immorality during the sixteenth and seventeenth century. Margaret Cavendish was addressed as an "illustrious whore" (Pearson, 1988, 10) in a slanderous epitaph, and many critics drew an analogy between the "Punk", that is, the prostitute, and the "Poetess" (Pearson, 1988, 9).

This widespread image of the female author as a fallen woman was a spectre which haunted women who actually wrote. Although on the whole texts produced by members of the "weaker sex" were judged to be inappropriate, not all women's writing was put in the same category. Some literary genres were labelled more appropriate for women than others, because they were related to the social areas to which women were socially assigned, or because they had a more private nature than others. Thus, as Tina Krontiris emphasises, "the acceptable literary areas for women were basically religion and domesticity" (1992, 17) as well as translation, which did not involve woman's active creativity. Women were less severely criticised or condemned for sexual looseness if they took up one of these more feminine genres.

A literary genre which was generally felt to be far from acceptable for women was drama. Drama is by definition a public genre, since a play is usually meant to be staged in front of an audience, whether at a domestic or public theatre. Drama implying a public audience, a woman who wrote for the stage put her sexual reputation at great risk. Considering the essentially public nature of drama, it is not remarkable that even more than women writing in other genres, women dramatists became subject to imputations of wantonness. Aphra Behn, the first woman playwright who is said to have earned her bread by writing for the public stage, was described by critics as "that lewd harlot, that poetick quean" who "put luscious Bawdry of for Wit" (quoted in Cotton, 1980, 76), condemnations which discouraged her from writing a play under her own name for three years.

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33There exist divergent views on the role of translation in Early Modern England. I will come back to this "translation debate" in my discussion of Mary Sidney's *The Tragedie of Antonie* in chapter 5.

34As Michelene Wandor propounds, it is exactly the public nature of drama and its connotations of female sexual incontinence, which is "one of the reasons why it was particularly problematic for women to engage seriously as playwrights" (1986, 75).
1.4. Conclusion.

As I have illustrated, the discourse which equated woman's speech and writing with sexual looseness dominated many cultural practises and expressions in Renaissance and early Restoration England. The predominance of this discourse resulted in the exclusion of women from the stage till 1660, and a severe condemnation of women who assumed the role of authors. Although the position of the woman writer was essentially problematic, in particular if she chose to engage with a public genre like drama, some women still expressed their voices, either on paper for an imaginary audience of readers, or in front of an audience of spectators. This is particularly due to the contradictions and gaps within the dominant discourses on female utterance, through which resistance to the cultural command of silence became feasible.