Wicked words, virtuous voices
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Figure 3: Frontispiece engraving to *Othello*, possibly from a Restoration production of the play. In Rowe, Nicholas. *Works of Shakespeare*, volume v (British Library).
Chapter 3: "Sorcery of Thy Tongue and Eyes": The Representation of Woman’s Discursive Subjectivity in Renaissance and early Restoration Tragedy.

This chapter provides an analysis of a wide range of Renaissance and early Restoration tragedies in relation to different social discourses on woman's speech and writing. Questions that will be central to the discussion are how outspoken women are represented and what different views on female utterance are expressed in the plays. Late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English playwrights mostly repudiated any fixed laws of dramatic composition, in particular the classical "laws of poesy" and "rules of art" (Klein, 1968, 164). However, there are still many things that tragedies written and performed during these periods have in common with regard to tragic vision, characterisation and plot. My aim in this chapter is to uncover the generic parameters of female subjectivity in male-authored Renaissance and early Restoration tragedy by comparing and contrasting several tragic plays in their treatment of speaking and silent women. I will focus on tragedies by male authors for several reasons. First, because male-authored tragedies constituted the dominant tragic tradition at the time, women being excluded from writing drama for the public stage. Second, because comparing and contrasting male- and female-authored tragedies makes it possible to examine the ways in which women refashioned the tragic genre as a result of their gender in my later chapters.

I have divided the chapter into subsections related to four different historical periods. Raymond Williams expounded the view that "when we come to study the [tragic] tradition we are immediately aware of change…all we can take quite for granted is the continuity of tragedy as a word" (1992, 16), so that tragedy has to be "understood and valued historically" (1992, 61). Taking into account the developments in tragedy as a genre during the Renaissance and early Restoration with regard to issues such as cross-dressing, closure of the theatres and the first admission of actresses to the stage in 1660, I have opted for a categorisation of the plays as Elizabethan tragedy, Jacobean tragedy, tragedy from the Caroline and Civil War periods, and early Restoration tragedy respectively. Within each historical period I will examine tragedy in relation to women's speech and sexuality, subjectivity and tragic closure.
3. 1. Elizabethan Tragedy: *Arden of Faversham, Titus Andronicus and The Spanish Tragedy*.

3.1.1. Woman, Speech and Sexuality in Elizabethan Tragedy.

Elizabethan tragedies generally endorse the dominant discourses on female utterance. In *The Tragedie of Arden of Faversham* (approx. 1586-91) Alice Arden, the adulterous protagonist, corresponds to the image of the wanton, wordy woman. When at one point Mosby wishes to end his adulterous affair with Alice, out of fear of discovery, Alice uses her verbal skills, her "sweet-set tongue", to "clear the trespass" of their liaison, and tempt Mosby back into continuing their sexual relationship (I, viii, 147).1 Alice's speech is clearly linked to her sexual incontinence. In addition, throughout the play Alice's sin is envisaged as text written on the physical space of the body: Alice claims that Mosby's name and their shame is "engraven…even in my forehead" (I, viii, 76) to be read by the rest of the world. Thus the concepts of discourse, the female body, and sexual immorality coalesce in this anonymous Elizabethan play. However, portraying a woman whose silence hides bawdy conduct and well transgressive desires, the playwright of *Arden of Faversham* also upsets the dominant cultural signification of silence as an emblem of chastity, and speech as a sign of wantonness. When Alice has persuaded Mosby to persist in their adultery, she commands that they should "seal up" their "new-made match" with their "lips" (I, viii, 150). As well as implying a kiss, this phrase suggests Alice's urge to muffle up their sexual immorality in silence. The inconsistencies within the dominant discourse on the female voice may already be discerned.

Written at about the same time, William Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* (1591) stages the stereotype of the wanton woman who uses her tongue as a means of seduction to wreak havoc upon others. Tamora, the Queen of the Goths, who has married the Roman Emperor, does not abide by marital laws, since she has an adulterous affair with the moor Aaron. At the same time Tamora proves to be eloquent, seeing her tongue as a smooth weapon by means of which she can easily win people over. When Titus Andronicus threatens to avenge his daughter's rape on the Emperor, Tamora convinces Emperor Saturninus that she will make Andronicus change his mind through the power of her persuasive tongue: "I will enchant the

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1 Viviana Comensoli describes Alice's behaviour in this scene as "willful encroachment upon the male prerogatives of desire and resoluteness" (1996, 89).
old Andronicus/ With words more sweet and yet more dangerous …For I can smooth and fill his aged ear, with golden promises" (IV, iv, 88-89).

3.1.2. Female Tragic Subjectivity on the Elizabethan Stage.

As I have pointed out in the introduction to this study, the Renaissance concept of subjectivity was related to issues of speech, such as self-expression, the production of meaning, and narrative control. Therefore, it is interesting to consider what view of female subjectivity is taken in the Elizabethan plays under discussion which implicitly privilege female silence over woman's speech by endorsing the cultural stereotype of the lewd, wordy woman. In *Arden of Faversham* Alice dramatically overturns the traditional significance of socially established notions. Alice attempts to display her undying devotion towards Mosby, by suggesting that she will never be converted to the chaste life of a good wife: she will "burn this prayerbook …will tear away the leaves" that command her to conform to the cultural ideal of the sexually continent spouse. Instead she argues that "in this golden cover… shall thy [Mosby's] sweet phrases and thy [Mosby's] letters dwell" (I, viii, 116-120). She wishes to fill the bookcover with the discourse of sexual attraction and transgressive love. In other words, desecrating the patriarchal word that is normally regarded as godly, and sanctifying the sinful word that is considered base, Alice subverts the meaning of conventional concepts. Thus she is in command over language and representation.

In Renaissance England women were denied the subject position that became established for men, hence they were assigned the role of known object rather than knowing subject. Alice, however, cannot be completely known or grasped by the male characters. For instance, she pretends reluctance at receiving Mosby in their home, but later on changes her protesting speeches into a submissive tone, claiming that she will "bid him welcome, seeing you [Arden] 'll have it so" (I, xiv, 187). Thus, Alice establishes an outward appearance of herself as being modest in speech, and obedient in behaviour towards her husband, which cleverly masks her interior rebellion and wicked plans. However, later on in the play Alice's interiority is undermined. When she has murdered her husband, she does not succeed in covering up her act of homicide. The blood she has spilt on the floor "cleaveth to the ground and will not out" (I, xiv, 255), and in taking out the body "the print of many feet" were left "within the snow" (I, xiv, 396), causing her crime to be discovered. In other words, Alice's interior secrets are exposed, and she is reduced to the status of a known object.
In a soliloquy one encounters the problem that the "I" that is represented does not exist simultaneously with the "I" that speaks, preceding it. In fact, inwardness in the theatre is always inwardness displayed, "an inwardness, in other words, that has already ceased to exist" (Maus, 1995, 23), even if a dramatic piece would not contain soliloquies. On the other hand, the soliloquy has an important function in that a character who addresses the audience, letting it glimpse into his inward mind, creates the impression of inwardness. Furthermore, soliloquies play a significant role in the characterisation of a play, since they can show a character to be a subject in process, defining and creating him or herself in language. In *Arden of Faversham* the soliloquy appears to be an essentially male form of discourse, being reserved for male characters. Whereas a villain like Mosby is granted a sense of interiority by being allowed to speak a soliloquy, Alice hardly ever is. Being denied this opportunity to communicate her most personal, inward thoughts to the spectators through a soliloquy, and thus construct an image of herself that is not influenced by others, Alice is also denied the chance to produce a sense of interiority.

Moreover, Alice continually loses control over the plot that she has in mind about killing her husband and living happily ever after with Mosby. Alice's plans for having her husband intercepted by the criminals Blackwill and Shakebag fail several times mainly because she does not completely authorise the plot, leaving the murder in the hands of the two clumsy men instead of acting herself. Second, Mosby often interferes with her plans: "I pray thee, leave it to my discretion" (I, i, 245). At the tragic closure, the Mayor sentences Alice to death. Thus the Mayor writes Alice's "ending" rather than allowing her to compose the end of her life herself. Although initially Alice made influential choices as a plotter, she fails to achieve narrative command over the course of events and over her own existence in the end.

There are some similarities between *Arden of Faversham* and *The Spanish Tragedy* in the scope that is left for woman's subjectivity: in both tragedies, woman's potential for subjectivity is undermined and appropriated by male characters. Having set her mind on revenging Don Andrea's death, Kyd's Bel-Imperia sees Don Horatio as the one who can carry out the vengeful plans that she has thought out. However, Horatio gets killed prematurely, so that this plot fails. She is denied an active part in plotting the murder of Balthasar and Lorenzo. Hieronimo proposes to have her plot supplanted by his, which aims at destroying the

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2 See Belsey, 1985, 149-60.
3 Jonathan Dollimore points to this problem in Radical Tragedy, 1984, 175-176.
4 "The soliloquy...is the condition of the possibility of presenting on the stage a new conception of the free-standing individual...the soliloquy makes audible the personal voice and offers access to the presence of an individual speaker" (Belsey, 1985, 42). See also Geis, 1984, 170.
murderers of his son. Thus he appropriates the role of "writer", and Bel-Imperia readily consents to be led by him in the realisation of his plot: “Let me entreat you, grace my practices./ For why, the plot’s already in mine head”(IV, i, 50-51). Bel-Imperia is thus reduced to the role of passive instrument, through which Hieronimo can achieve his goals, and is denied any active agency.

Interestingly, performing as an actress in the play within the play, Bel-Imperia can only act out her revenge on Balthasar, because Hieronimo told her to act like this: "That Soliman which Bel-Imperia/ In person of Perseda murdered/ Solely appointed to that tragic part/ That she might slay him that offended her"(IV, iv, 137-139). Although Bel-Imperia thus functions as Hieronimo’s instrument, she also manages to shape her dramatic part to her own ends. As Hieronimo explains after the performance, Bel-Imperia's death was not designed by him: “Poor Bel-Imperia missed her part in this/ For though the story saith she should have died,/ Yet of kindness and of care to her, Did otherwise determine of her end" (IV, iv, 140-143). In other words, Bel-Imperia rather chooses to plot her own life and death to a certain extent than have her existence controlled and taken over by others. However, directing her own life plot rather than assuming a part, Bel-Imperia has to die. Put differently, the status of subject that Bel-Imperia attains through her self-fashioned plot at the same time implies an erasure of selfhood.

Although Tamora manages to trick Saturninus into being directed by her, she is not always successful in her role as "author" of plots. For instance, when she has persuaded Saturninus to let her personify “Revenge”(V, ii, 3), and thus to temper him "with words more sweet and yet more dangerous” (IV, iv, 88), promising to “ruminate strange plots of dire revenge”(V, ii, 6), she fails utterly. Titus Andronicus, recognising Tamora through her disguise, and aware that she plays tricks upon him, cleverly takes over the role of plotter without Tamora noticing this. Convincing her that she should leave her sons, cast in the roles of “Rape”and “Murder”, behind, he slaughters them, and subsequently serves them as a dish to Tamora who naively eats “the flesh that she herself hath bred” (V, iii, 62). In other words, Tamora is turned from the knowing subject into the deluded known object. This transformation is underlined by the dramatic irony that her level of knowledge does not parallel that of the spectators: the audience sees what Titus Andronicus has in store for Tamora, and thus can know more about the play than she can.5

5 This fits in with Margeson's view that "in Elizabethan tragedy the tragic character recognizes part of the truth at the time of the catastrophe…The rest is for the audience to try to comprehend in the context of the whole play (1967, 182).
3.1.3. The Elizabethan Tragic Closure.

In this subsection I will discuss three important aspects of the tragic closures in the Elizabethan plays under discussion: the issue of transgression in relation to the ending that is assigned to the female characters in the plays; the representation of the deaths of these characters; and the depiction of female deaths in the plays. In her study of the tragic genre, Linda Kintz applies the term "passive causality" (1992, 82) to female characters in tragedy, arguing that whereas male characters might be responsible for a tragic act, women who become the victims of male agency are regarded as guilty instead of blameless. Kintz’s views accord with the depiction of Lavinia in *Titus Andronicus*. Conforming to the cultural ideal of the chaste, silent and obedient woman, it seems unjust that Lavinia should suffer so much, and become grotesquely transformed into the passive, voiceless female by having her tongue cut out by her rapists. Although the cruelty that Lavinia is subjected to does not issue from any sin or transgression on her part, she is implicitly blamed for her loss of spotlessness. Her father appoints her as the cause of suffering and shame. Although he grieves bitterly about seeing his dear daughter Lavinia "handless" in his "sight" (III, i, 68), and admits that it was "Chiron and Demetrius…that did her all this wrong" (V, iii, 56-58) at the same time Titus Andronicus claims that he must kill his daughter. The reason is that by ending her shame, his sorrow could die, just as Virginius killed his deflowered daughter, because "the girl should not survive her shame/ And by her presence still renew his sorrows" (V, iii, 41-42). Thus, despite the fact that Lavinia was the passive, victimised object of Demetrius's and Chiron's rape, she must be sacrificed to Titus Andronicus's knife, because her fate inflicts shame, grief and defilement upon the family.

In Renaissance culture the concept of interiority was often associated with the womb, conceived as a brooding place of hidden, dark actions, "a private space of thoughts yet unuttered, or actions yet unexecuted" (Maus, 1995, 190). As such, maternity was often linked to secret plans to take revenge. It is interesting to consider Tamora in the light of this Renaissance cultural reading of the womb. Pleading in vain for her son's life to Titus Andronicus who shows no compassion for her maternal sorrow, Tamora swears "pitiless" revenge for the fact that he "would not relent" (II, iii, 65). Thus, the text voices some

6 Karl Jaspers makes a similar distinction between "active" and "passive" guilt in tragedy, whereby "passive guilt" originates from the mere fact of existence, and "active" guilt is caused by action. See Jaspers, 1971, 777-78.

7 As Catharine Stimpson puts it, like other female characters such as Lucrece, Lavinia must die in order to purge "the lives and honours of the men whom they have ornamented" (1980, 59).
sympathy for Tamora's desire to wreak havoc upon Titus Andronicus, showing it to issue from a mother's grief. This sympathy is negated by the fact that Tamora abuses her sons in order to achieve her goal of taking revenge, encouraging them to rape Lavinia and thus risk their lives. She shows no mercy when Lavinia, like a daughter to a mother, implores her to protect her sexual purity. Thus, Tamora's flaw is a lack of maternal empathy and care. The tragic fate that she has to suffer in this respect is significant: being fed her own sons, Tamora not only comes to personify the relentless mother who is willing to sacrifice her sons, but also loses her maternal, procreative powers. In fact, her feasting on her sons could be seen as a reversed childbirth, visualised on stage. The corpses of her sons being carried back into her body, her female body is figured as that which bodes death rather than life.

In the final speech of Marston's play _Antonio's Revenge_ (1602), the sequel to _Antonio and Mellida_ Andrugio speaks of "a Muse/ That to th'immortal fame of virgin faith/ Dares once engage his pen to write her death/ Presenting it in some black tragedy" (V, iii). As Michael Neill underlines, tragedy was "among the principal instruments by which the culture of Early Modern England reinvented death" (1997, 3), using it as a means to come to terms with their fear of the erasure of identity implied by death. At the closure of _Titus Andronicus_ there are several dead bodies on the stage, yet there proves to be a great difference between the representation of deaths connected with the male and the female characters, respectively. Catherine Belsey explains that suicide, the power to decide on one's life and death, can be regarded as an expression of autonomy: "death which is self-inflicted, chosen, puts an end to finitude itself". She claims that through suicide an individual man becomes "the origin and guarantee of its own identity, the source of being, meaning and action". As such, "suicide re-establishes the sovereign subject" (1985, 124). Furthermore, in Renaissance England the Senecan philosophy of stoicism had a great impact upon ideas about tragedy as a genre. According to stoicism, which often manifested itself as political resistance effected by indifference rather than interference concerning tyranny, the ultimate stoic act is suicide. The reason for this is that suicide implies the point where man's "drive for control becomes totally and unsurpassably self-referential in a final triumph over the world outside" (Braden, 1985, 24). The ultimate integrity and autonomy over man's existence is reached by self-

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8 As Marion Wynne-Davies argues, "one of the corporal symbols of the play" is "the womb" (1991, 135) which threatens males with castration and victimisation.
9 Catharine Stimpson comes to a similar conclusion about the scene, claiming that when Tamora "incorporates" her sons "back into her body it is an inversion of the release of a living child that marks natural maternity" (1980, 60).
10 See also Klein, 1984, 153.
annihilation. It is interesting to consider this view on suicide in relation to *Titus Andronicus*, because the extent to which characters are granted autonomy over their deaths is determined by gender. Titus Andronicus fills in Lavinia's thoughts. In doing so, he apparently projects the patriarchal demands upon her body and mind. In this way, moreover, he appropriates control over Lavinia's life, as he plots the end of her life.

Like Lavinia, Tamora already loses control over the plots that she attempts to invent for the other characters before she is deprived of authority over her own life. Interestingly, Tamora is not allowed to respond to Titus's revelation that her two sons were "baked in that pie; Whereof their mother daintily hath fed" (V, iii, 60-61), for she is immediately stabbed to death by him. In other words, whereas Titus Andronicus operates as the discoverer here, Tamora can no longer assert an identity. By contrast, before he is put to a stake to be famished to death, the villain Aaron voices protest against his submission, and thus, attains a moment of self-assertion while facing the threat of elimination. Aaron raves that he is "no baby", that he refuses to repent of "the evils I [he] have [has] done", that he would perform "if I might have my will... Ten thousand worse than ever yet I did" and that he would regret "If one good deed in all my life I did" (V, iii, 185-190). In this way Aaron clearly sets himself apart from the outside world. In addition, he expresses a sense that he cannot be contained or controlled by others. Michael Neill's statement that Renaissance tragedy offered a fantasy "to overcome...fear of erasure of identity, by representing death as a moment of distinction and self-assertion" (1997, 32) appears to be true of tragic male rather than tragic female characters.

In English Renaissance culture the fear of self-annihilation in the process of dying was also negotiated by memorialising the dead intensively, in the form of extensive burial rites as a means to stress the identity of the deceased.\(^\text{11}\) The transgressive woman, Tamora, is denied the rituals of reminiscence: "No funeral rite, nor man in mournful weeds/ No mournful bell shall ring her burial/ But throw her forth to beasts and birds of prey" (V, iii, 196-198). Moreover, since her body is to be eaten away and no monument is erected for her, the wanton, wordy Tamora is relegated to the realm of absolute oblivion.\(^\text{12}\) Thus, the threat that she poses to the gender norms is appropriately eradicated.

In *The Spanish Tragedy*, too, there are great differences in the depiction of the deaths

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\(^{11}\) Neill speaks of "a consolatory instrument of memoria" (1997, 41) in this respect.
\(^{12}\) Tamora and Aaron also do not receive proper burial rites, because they "are not of Rome" (Barker, 1993, 147). The Roman characters demarcate their society as culture, in contrast to what lies "beyond the gates" (Barker, 1993, 148), even though a close reading of the play reveals that Rome is a "primitive society" (1993, 143) rather than a culturally refined one.
of the men on the one hand, and the ends reserved for the female sex on the other. As I have shown, at the tragic closure Hieronimo is in control of the acts of plotting. He establishes himself as a playwright who can govern the fates of those around him, and chooses to kill himself with the pen knife rather than submitting to the king who commands to "make thee [him] speak" (IV, iv, 164). This autonomy is underlined by the fact that the conclusion of the tragedy that he had composed also marks the moment in which he writes the ending to the drama of his life. Hieronimo strongly asserts his identity before he dies, when he exclaims in front of the audience: "And princes, now behold Hieronimo./ Author and actor in this tragedy" (IV, iv, 146-47). In this manner Hieronimo not only draws attention to himself as a speaking subject, but also establishes himself as a generator of meaning.

Bel-Imperia does not enjoy such a particular moment of self-assertion before her death. The words that she speaks before she commits suicide on the stage are not her own, but belong to the part that Hieronimo had written for her in the play within the play. Unlike Tamora and Lavinia who are killed, and thus lack authority and control over the "plots" of their lives, Bel-Imperia determines the ending to her own life, in this respect ignoring Hieronimo's stage directions. Since she thus both plots and performs her own narrative ending, Bel-Imperia achieves an autonomy which is unusual for tragic women. In addition, her narrative agency is visible, for she kills herself on stage. This is not common for tragic female characters, who, as Loraux makes clear, conventionally die off stage and in silence; the dead body shown to the audience, but the woman's act of dying hardly ever. This autonomy is partly undermined when Hieronimo explains her as a woman who crossed his dramaturgical purposes. He assumes the role of her signifier after her death, reducing her to the known object of his interpretations.

As we have perceived, at the conclusion of Arden of Faversham the sexually and discursively transgressive woman is turned into a controllable, known feminine object that is appropriately ruled out and silenced. Interestingly, there appears to be a difference between Alice and her husband in that the latter appears to be able to transcend death as a discursive subject, whereas Alice does not. Having slain her husband, and being subsequently unsuccessful in rubbing the blood stains from the floor, Alice exclaims: "The blood condemns me and in gushing forth/ Speaks as it falls, and asks me why I did it" (I, xvi, 5-6). Alice's description of her husband's blood in terms of speaking and asking, although obviously used

13 Thus, Hieronimo belongs to the stock of "characters of Renaissance tragedy " which, as Michael Neill argues, often perform the role of "dramatists" who "so frequently envisage their ends in heavily narrativized terms" (1997, 205).
in a figurative sense, suggests that Arden continues to perform the role of the subject who can condemn, hence, signify others, beyond death. No such post-mortoral voice or physical presence is granted to Alice, her abduction to the scaffold marking her disappearance from the stage.


3.2.1. The "Begrimed" Tragic Woman of Jacobean Theatre.

Jacobean tragedies are often similar to Elizabethan tragic plays in their depiction of woman's speech in relation to her sexuality. In Middleton and Rowley's late Jacobean tragedy *The Changeling* (1622), the dominant discourses on the female voice play a major role. From the opening of the play the main female protagonist, Beatrice Joanna, appears witty and bold in speech. For example, when she has set eyes on Alsemero, Beatrice converses with him in a discourse which contains overt sexual allusions. She openly compliments him on his ability to "sing at first sight" (I, i, 66), that is, to make love at first sight, and inquires after the "sciences" (I, i, 64) of love that he is skilled in. Since Beatrice Joanna displays both an assertive voice as well as sexually immodest speeches, the play endorses the cultural association of woman's speech with lewdness. This in turn is further underlined by the fact that De Flores derives "pleasure", that is sexual enjoyment and titillation from Beatrice Joanna 's outspoken speeches. He claims that "Tis half an act of pleasure to hear her talk thus to me" (II, ii, 87), the word "act" alluding to copulation, as it often does.

In Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Maid's Tragedy* (1610) the cultural association between woman's speech and wantonness is both endorsed and challenged. Evadne appears to confirm the idea that wordy and witty women are sexually incontinent, yielding to the king's sexual desire for her, and feeling no shame. For example, when Amintor criticises her for marrying him when she was no longer spotless, Evadne defends herself by claiming the right to save her honour through marriage. She openly voices her determination "never to be acquainted" (II, i, 218) with Amintor's bed in spite of his fierce protestations, and explicitly dares to mention the fact that she is no longer intact: "I am no virgin" (II, i, 293). Although Evadne thus appears to personify the cultural stereotype of the wanton, wordy woman, at other points of the plot her behaviour also contradicts this image. Ironically, while Evadne does not set great store by her virginity in general, giving it up to sleep with the king, she forbears to sleep with Amintor. She has vowed faithfulness to the king by swearing she would
ne'er enjoy a man" (III, i, 167) but him. Although society would regard Evadne as a "whore" (III, i, 253), as Amintor makes clear, Evadne is still sexually continent in the sense, of having a monogamous relationship.

In Othello (1604) the belief that a woman's speech signals sexual looseness is undermined. The female protagonist Desdemona bears similarities to the cultural spectre of the wanton, talkative woman. Throughout the play she exhibits a great capacity for eloquence, for asserting her tongue as a means of charming, and thus, disempowering men. She also grants herself the liberty to speak her mind openly. For instance, when Othello has dismissed Cassio for his rude behaviour, Desdemona attempts to talk Othello into reconciliation with him. She openly expresses her mind on the subject, having the confidence she will "watch him tame and talk him out of patience" (III, iii, 23). Having the gift of eloquence, Desdemona also openly displays her will and sexual desire. In defending her love for Othello in front of her father and the Duke, Desdemona claims that she would suffer immensely if she were left behind: "A moth of peace, and he go to the war/ The rites for which I love him are bereft me" (I, iii, 252-253).

Yet the play does not equate Desdemona with the cultural stereotype of the wanton wordy female. Any references to Desdemona as sexually transgressive are produced by men who either deliberately seek to bring her reputation down or who are blinded by distorted perceptions. Jonathan Dollimore explains that the character of the "stage misogynist" (1984, 292) who intentionally and unjustly slanders a woman appears in Renaissance drama regularly. Iago clearly belongs to this category of stage misogynists as he tries to blemish Desdemona's sexual reputation in order to satisfy his envious desire to destroy Othello emotionally. As Iago acknowledges, he will use Desdemona's good-natured pleading for Cassio as the means to "pour…pestilence" (II, iii, 323) into Othello's ear: "So will I turn her virtue into pitch/ And out of her own goodness make the net/ That shall enmesh them all" (II, iii, 327-329). Hinting to Othello that Desdemona's whispered conversations with Cassio reveal a secret love affair, Iago abuses the dominant discourses that a woman who asserts her voice is sexually loose as a tool to achieve his wicked ends. In addition, Othello's description of Desdemona as a "cunning whore of Venice" (IV, ii, 88) is not trustworthy, since it is rooted in the flawed perspective that Iago has helped to create. Thus, the speaking, sexually incontinent female proves to be a projection of the male mind rather than a reality.

There are parallels between Othello and John Webster's tragedy The Duchess of Malfi (1613). Like Desdemona, Webster's Duchess follows her heart instead of the restrictions on conduct imposed by the male members of her family. Her brothers Ferdinand and the
Cardinal urge her not to remarry now that she is widowed. Nevertheless, the Duchess is not restrained by this "law of the Father", as symbolized by her "father's poniard" (I, ii, 238), from engaging herself with her servant Antonio and tying the knot. In addition, like Desdemona, the Duchess displays a great sense of wit, and at times openly voices her thoughts without inhibition. For example, the Duchess appropriates the role of speaker in situations where society expects a woman to be silent. Instead of being won over by Antonio, she takes the active part of the wooer, being forced to do so because of their difference in rank: "because none dare woo us" (I, ii, 344).15

Despite the Duchess's assertion of sexual independence, she upsets the dominant assumption that eloquent outspoken women are bawdy. As the Duchess hands over her ring to Antonio as a sign of their betrothal and her devotion, she claims: "'Twas my wedding ring/ And I did vow never to part with it/ But to my second husband" (I, ii, 311-313). The fact that the Duchess will only give away her ring, the symbol of woman's sexuality in Renaissance discourses, to those that she is bound to in marriage suggests her desire for a monogamous sexual relationship. In fact, like Othello, Webster's play undermines the dominant ideological discourses that define woman's speech as a sign of sexual looseness. The tragedy shows the dominant discourses to be projections of the male mind, and Webster equates man's words with bawdiness. When Ferdinand admonishes his sister not to wed again, he suggests that women are tempted to remarry, because they "like that part, which, like the lamprey/ hath never a bone in it" (I, ii, 242-243). His remark leads the Duchess to tell her brother off, as "that part…which hath never a bone in it" is sexually explicit and immodest. In short, whereas the Duke creates the impression that the female sex is extremely lustful, his explicit sexual pun reveals that man's rather than woman's speech is bound up with bawdiness. In response to his sister's "Fie!" (I, ii, 243) Ferdinand claims that he did not allude to the phallus with the word "that part", but "mean[s] the tongue" (I, ii, 244), asserting that women easily surrender to men's flattering speeches. This shift in the meaning attributed to the term “that part" is again revealing, as it indicates that Ferdinand relates speech to lust. Hence, we may view his suspicion of the wordy Duchess’s boundless sexual desire as a projection of his own vile mind.16

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15 As McLuskie contends, "The Duchess first impresses us as a figure whose wit and vitality are more appropriate to a comic setting and yet by the end of the play she has undoubted tragic stature" (1985, 83).
16 This reading is justified, for later on in the play Ferdinand is staged as someone who has "strange" voyeuristic, almost incestuous "imaginings" of seeing his sister "in the shameful act of sin" (Carol Hansen, 1993, 28) with Antonio.
3.2.2. The Jacobean Tragic Woman and the Mystery of Meaning.

Middleton and Rowley's character Beatrice Joanna fits in the line of wordy, wanton women like Alice Arden and Tamora, who first exert authority over the process of signifying, but who ultimately lose this control. At the beginning of the play, she displays her remarkable wit and eloquence in a flirtatious conversation with Alsemero:

_Beatrice Joanna_: Which of the sciences is this love you speak of.
_Alsemero_: From your tongue, I take it to be music.
_Beatrice Joanna_: You are skilful in't, can sing at first sight. (I, i, 63-66)

Beatrice Joanna manages to grasp the underlying, sexual meaning of Alsemero's words, and she plays along with him in their interview that abounds with *double entendres* by communicating with him in the same manner of discourse. Yet, De Flores undermines and alters the meaning of herself that Beatrice had produced. Whereas Beatrice makes much of her feminine modesty, seeing it as an integral part of her identity, De Flores challenges Beatrice's representation of herself. Being "dipped in blood" as much as himself, to De Flores Beatrice becomes divested of her superiority, and thereby equal to him. Subsequently, not having any space in the text or good arguments to contradict De Flores's definitions of her, Beatrice loses authority over the representation of her self. This loss of authority over her image culminates in De Flores's transformation of her being into the image that he has already cast of her in language, when he abducts her to deflower and bewhore her.

As we have seen, Evadne is portrayed as the sexually independent, outspoken villainess. In an interview with her brother Melantius, who tells her off for her conduct, Evadne angrily exclaims "I'll ha'you whipped" (IV, i, 69). This is an interesting statement considering the fact that in seventeenth-century England to be whipped was considered the conventional punishment for whores, as is revealed by the at that time common expression “to be whipped at the tail of a cart”. While society would feel justified to have Evadne whipped for her sexual transgression, Evadne turns around conventional ideas by placing herself in the role of the castigator. Thus, at the beginning of the play Evadne can still exert some control over the process of signification, challenging the semantics of patriarchal notions by reconstructing them and recreating the definitions that society imposes upon her. Evadne is not moved by Amintor's pressure to "make thy tongue undo this wicked oath" (III, i, 97) of observing chastity towards the king. Her refusal to speak the words that Amintor commands

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18 As Eileen Allman convincingly argues, Evadne's "bold seizure of authority over her body" by refusing to sleep with Amintor, is "an assault to maleness itself" (1999, 79).
her to, indicates Evadne's control over her voice, and Evadne's unwillingness to give in to him shows that she will not let him dictate the part that she is to play.

Evadne ends up deprived of the subjectivity that she displays at an earlier stage of the play. Ironically, the moment at which Evadne loses command over language and the plot is when she is overruled to confess her shame by Melantius, who threatens to kill her if she does not reveal all the details of her illicit conduct. Her compliance with Melantius's wish to confess the truth and aim for goodness henceforth results in Evadne's opening up her bosom to her brother. This loss of control over her interior is accompanied by a loss of authority over her life. Apparently obeying her brother in her conversion, Evadne submits to his command that she should take revenge upon the king by murdering him: "Evadne, thou wilt to thy trade again…I command thee curse him…Come, you shall kill him" (IV, i, 135-156). Evadne succeeds in assassinating the king, and thus, in carrying out the plot that her brother had "written" for her. Her acceptance of the role that her brother assigns to her at the same time entails that Evadne does not attain the desired end that she had envisaged for herself and Amintor. Running to meet Amintor "with bloody hands, carrying a knife" (V, iii) Evadne believes that through killing the king she will be redeemed by Amintor and accepted once again as his wife:

Amintor, I am loaden with events
That fly to make thee happy (V, iii, 108-121)

However, rather than being happy to hear that Evadne has killed his former rival, Amintor is disgusted by Evadne's deed, and orders her out of his sight. Thus, the plot that she had invented herself of being reunited with Amintor fails utterly. At this stage Evadne has also lost the quality to control the representations of herself. She is unable to offer an alternative meaning of herself in opposition to Amintor's condemnations, and to convince him that his view of her is wrong.

Shakespeare's Desdemona appears to conform to the conventional pattern of the tragic woman who has to surrender her status as subject. Whereas these other tragic plays appear to condone woman's enforced forfeiture of discursive and narrative control, Othello makes clear that Desdemona's loss of subjectivity issues from her husband's uncertainty about his identity. The play shows that Othello suffers from tragic error and blindness in his treatment of his spouse. Before Othello's mind starts to be infected by Iago's insinuations of his wife's unchaste behaviour, communication between Othello and Desdemona runs smoothly. They are able to understand each other, and Desdemona feels free to express her mind to him. Significantly, Desdemona loses her grip upon the process of signification when Othello
manifests his suspicions of her sexuality for the first time. Demanding Desdemona to show him her "eyes", and "look in" his "face" (IV, ii, 23-24) so he can inspect her honesty, Desdemona is completely at a loss as to the significance of his words:

> What horrible fancy's this? Upon my knees, what doth your speech import? I understand a fury in your words/but not the words. (25, 30-32)

Yet Othello feels that he cannot discover Desdemona's real nature. He cannot ascertain whether the meaning of Dea, goddess, or Demona, wanton fiend, applies to her. Othello responds to his uncertainty about Desdemona’s signification by transferring his lack of control over meaning to her. He blurs the import of his speeches by refusing to let her know why he acts in this way, and consequently, turns her into a person who can no longer figure out the meaning of his words. Subsequently, Othello attempts to appropriate his control over the process of signifying Desdemona by refusing to listen to what she says. Ultimately, Othello's denial of Desdemona's view of herself leads to her complete silencing. When Desdemona attempts to defend herself against Othello's imputations, he commands her to hold "peace and be still!" (V, ii, 47). That he reduces Desdemona to the role of listener is shown by the fact that Desdemona's phrase in response to his command is a question: "I will so, what's the matter" (V, ii, 48). This makes clear that "she again assumes the role of audience, trying to understand Othello" (Novy, 1980, 258). That Othello manages to appropriate Desdemona’s discursive power is indicated by two more things. First, by his successful elimination of her voice. Second, by the fact that shortly before she breathes her last Desdemona appears to have internalised the significations that Othello had previously sought to enforce upon her. When Emilia discovers her dying mistress and asks her who mortally injured her, Desdemona claims: "Nobody; I myself" (V, ii, 125). Desdemona thus takes the blame for Othello's murdering her. She tolerates the fact that society will consider her as a dishonest woman, instead of seeking to counter Othello's view of her character.

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19 As Madelon Gohlke also points out, Othello regards Desdemona "a whore, one whose entire behaviour may be explained in terms of lust" (1980, 155). Interestingly, in another tragedy by Shakespeare, Hamlet, we see the female characters solely through the eyes of the male protagonist, and thus, through the interpretations that he gives of them. Although Hamlet accuses his mother for wantonness and dishonourable conduct, a look at her behaviour in the play indicates that on the whole Gertrude is silent and submissive. Mary Beth Rose and Linda Bamber also conclude that the audience and readers never get to know Gertrude, because she is the vessel of his feelings and the site of his discursive constructions of her. See Rose, 1986, 95-101 and 110; Bamber, 1982, 87-88. As James Hill contends, we do not see the female characters' "inner lives, nor sensed the intensity of their inner conflicts" (1986, 253), the parts of women in tragedies being played by boy-actors who could not yet perform too complicated character roles. Although Hill will be right in assuming this, I also believe that the one-dimensional representation of women in plays like Hamlet has to do with the playwright’s or society’s anxiety about female subjectivity.

20 For a further discussion of the representation of woman's voice and female tragic subjectivity in Othello, see Corporaal, 2002b.
The virtuous yet slandered Desdemona loses control over her existence and the
dramatic plot in the course of the play. Othello denies Desdemona's plot of the past events,
enforcing his own version of the story line upon her. Second, by murdering his beloved,
Othello does not allow Desdemona the autonomy to fashion her own death. According to
Abbe Blum, in seventeenth-century tragedies like *Othello* women were often killed because
of the male characters' need to "monumentalize" (1990, 104) them, that is, because of men's
urge to silence women. They transform their living, sexually active bodies into mute statues
that are marked by "coldness, …lack of desire" (1990, 104), as the means of exerting control
over their sexual conduct. By reducing Desdemona to an alabaster-like corpse, Othello feels
that he restores Desdemona's once cold sexuality, her virginity: "Cold, cold my girl/Even like
thy chastity" (V, ii, 273-274). 21 Othello pronouncing these phrases, the audience could see a a
supposedly dead, cold female body on stage that may have looked like a statue. Murdering
Desdemona and reducing her to the status of a statue-like monument, Othello attempts to
undo and reverse the plot of adultery that Desdemona is presumed to have acted out with
Cassio. Othello tries to supplant Desdemona's "plot" by one which turns back the clock and
erases possible events. At the same time, Othello's murder of his wife can be read as his effort
to restore his masculine power and control over Desdemona, and to avoid a "feminine ending"
(Berry, 1999, 10) as a powerless being. 22

The *Duchess of Malfi* also criticises the way in which the male characters curtail and
eliminate woman's subjectivity by depicting it as morally wrong. As Ferdinand and the
Cardinal make clear in their interview with her, the Duchess should not try to harbour secret
plans, actions and thoughts, as "Your darkest action, nay, your privatest thought will come to
light" ( I, ii, 222-223). 23 That their remarks are not just threats, becomes clear from the fact
that they "entertain… Bosola…for…intelligence" (I, ii, 134-35), ordering him to spy upon
their sister. In other words, the Duchess is placed in the position of the ignorant woman who
can be known by the male subjects around her. Her pure openness contrasts with the fact that

21 In an examination of this phenomenon of monumentalisation, Sara Eaton makes clear that the male characters' desire
to murder women as the means to control them, is often accompanied by their urge to leave the woman's flesh "perfect and undeformed" (1991, 184). Othello's desire to keep Desdemona's skin smooth as alabaster appears to be an indication of this fetishization of the female body that marks the process of monumentalisation in Renaissance tragedies.

22 The term "feminine ending" is derived from Philippa Berry's major study on tragedy and death, *Shakespeare's Feminine Endings* (1999). As Berry points out, "at the level of plot the tragedies' female characters frequently disrupt the stability and continuity of masculine identity" (10), as a result of which the male characters fear the erasure of their masculine selfhood and power. It is often the deaths of the female characters that prevent a feminine ending of the male dramatic personae.

23 As Judith Haber explains, the Duchess creates a sense of interiority, by displaying sexual autonomy in
determining who may invade her body sexually. She "attempts to construct and control her own body, to create a
circular "feminine" space” like an enclosed garden "that is free from invasion" (1999, 138).
Ferdinand's and the Cardinal's inward beings store secrets that cannot be trusted into the open, since they attest to incestuous desires in Ferdinand's case, and to adulterous and murderous passions in Cardinal's case. The two brothers representing secret bestial lust and greediness, Webster suggests that their urge to inspect their sister's inwardness is unjustified.

Although her brothers try to talk her out of re-marrying, the Duchess is not impressed by their threats. Whereas Webster's female protagonist aptly realises her plans, she is forced to surrender the control over her existence in the course of the play. Receiving the information of his sister's secret remarriage, the Cardinal can fool the Duchess into believing that her husband and children have been killed by showing her some waxen statues. Thus he creates an illusionary plot through which he can manipulate and control her mind. Subsequently her brother has the Duchess sequestered. The space to which she is confined symbolises the Duchess's relegation to the social position that her brother had in mind for her. In other words, it signals that her brother has succeeded in imposing his plot upon her life, and in curtailing his sister's potential to walk out on the plot that he authorises.

3.2.3. The Jacobean Tragic Closure and Transcendence.

As far as transcendence over death is concerned in *The Changeling*, one can conclude that De Flores as a villain is granted this form of transcendence in the play. In his final appearance on the stage he contends: "her honour's prize was the reward, I thank life for nothing but that pleasure…I loved this woman in spite of her heart; Her love I earned out of Piracquo's murder" (V, iii, 165-69). De Flores is thus given the chance to unravel the course of events, unveil the truth and expose Beatrice as the object of his discursive and physical command. By contrast, Beatrice Joanna is not allowed any transcendence over death, although she and De Flores have sinned equally in their complicity in murder and adultery. She is not heard by Alsemero when she tries to defend herself by suggesting that she has been "true unto your bed" (V, iii, 82), and is locked up in the closet. Consequently, she can hardly refute De Flores's imputations that she is a common whore, and she is not given the possibility to assert her identity, before her life is ended cruelly by De Flores.

Amintor's negative response to his wife's murder of the king in *The Maid's Tragedy* suggests that Evadne is denied the possibility to transcend her sins. When Amintor will not forgive her nor restore her to him as his spouse, Evadne argues that "Evadne whom thou hat'st will die for thee" (V, iii, 172), and subsequently stabs herself to death. In bleak contrast with the defiant, self-conscious Evadne whom we saw earlier on in the play, the final scene
presents us with a woman who depends upon man for essence and selfhood. This is particularly revealed by Evadne's reference to herself as "Evadne", rather than as "I". Evadne apparently has come to absorb the social prescription that a woman who has been sexually spoilt should die. As in *Titus Andronicus* the world of this play is based on the principle that a woman's sexual defilement should lead to her death. This becomes evident from Melantius' statement that Evadne has "death" about her, because of her "poisoned… virtue" (IV, i, 86-87). This is a principle that Evadne eventually conforms to. Although Evadne fashions her own death, her suicide is placed in a negative light by the depiction of suicide in general as a form of cowardice and baseness later on in the play. When Melantius learns that his best friend Amintor is dead, he "draws his sword and makes to stab himself" (V, iii, 273). He is, however, stopped by Diphilus, who reproaches him for his intention: "Fie, how unmanly was this offer in you/ Does this become our strain?" (V, iii, 275-276). This negative portrayal of suicide in general prevents Evadne from being established as an autonomous woman. The fact that suicide is defined as an unmanly act creates the impression that Evadne is, after all, a weak woman. In addition, Evadne is apparently denied a surviving position in discourse after death. Being told about his sister's death, Melantius argues that it "is a thing to laugh at in respect of" (V, iii, 263) Amintor's mortal injuries. Since apparently Melantius sees no need to commemorate his sister or spend further words upon her, it ensues that Evadne will be doomed to silence after her decease.

When one compares Othello and Desdemona in relation to the issue of transcendence, one comes to the conclusion that Desdemona hardly reaches transcendence, whereas Othello overcomes both his transgression and death. Othello's final moments are not only marked by his awareness that he loved "not wisely, but too well" (V, ii, 340). They also encompass an assertion of his identity and a relegation of his soul to memory. Wounding his enemy Iago physically in exchange for the psychological wound that he had received, Othello calls himself "honourable" (V, ii, 291), distinguishing himself from other villains and murderers like Iago. In thus establishing his difference from others, Othello asserts his identity and constructs his representation. Apart from this, Othello also transcends mortality by securing a place in discourse after death. In his final speech Othello informs Cassio and Lodovico:

I pray you, in your letters
When you shall these unlucky deeds relate,
Speak of me as I am; nothing extenuate. (V, ii, 336-337)

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24 As Vanita rightly claims, Othello's murder of his wife is envisaged as sinful, only because Desdemona was innocent. The issue of whether murdering an adulterous wife is morally good or wrong is never questioned in the play. See Vanita, 1994, 340-43.
As these final words reveal, Othello urges those left behind to remember him in discourse, to write and speak about him. In other words, he attempts to survive the obliteration of subjectivity and selfhood that awaits him. Unlike Othello's final moments, Desdemona's farewell to the world is marked by self-denial rather than self-assertion. Moreover, Desdemona's transcendence over death is only brief. The woman whose voice serves to commemorate her name and identity and expose the truth about her fate, Emilia, is murdered by her husband Iago immediately after her revelation. The other character who has her name on his lips is Othello, who commits suicide immediately after her death.

As a play, *The Duchess of Malfi* is unique for its period, because it grants the female protagonist full transcendence over death. As we have seen, the Cardinal seeks to monumentalise his sister by locking her up and having her slain. This monumentalising is anticipated by Cariola's statement that her mistress looks "like to your picture in the gallery, / A deal of life in show, but none in practice; Or rather like some reverend monument/ Whose ruins are even pitied" (IV, ii, 31-34; emphasis mine). Although her brother wishes to reduce her to the status of a lifeless being, the Duchess transcends her silencing. For one thing, at the moment that Bosola prepares himself for killing her, the Duchess exclaims:"I am Duchess of Malfi still" (IV, ii, 126, 133). Thus asserting her identity, she defies the erasure of identity through death that awaits her. Interestingly, the Duchess's voice, which she thus raises before Bosola kills her, even proves to survive death. In line with Ferdinand's belief that "the duchess/ Haunts me" (V, ii, 337-38) after her death, is the scene in which Antonio and Delio, while still unaware of the duchess's death, are haunted by her voice. Upon entering the fortification, Delio remarks: "This fortification…Gives the best echo that you ever heard….So plain in the distinction of our words, That many have supposed it a spirit". When subsequently Antonio finds his words echoed, he remarks that the echo is "very like my wife's voice" (V, iii, 1-26). In other words, the playwright suggests here that the Duchess lives on as a haunting spirit whose voice can still express itself and be heard; in particular as in the stage directions it is mentioned that the echo comes "from the Duchess' grave". The Duchess does not belong to the category of characters whose "unruly" (Rutter, 2001, 11) bodies resist death

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25 As Frances Dolan maintains, in seventeenth-century England agency in a woman was almost always related to transgression; See Dolan, 1989, 201.

26 In her defiant assertion of her identity the Duchess resembles Webster's female protagonist from *The White Devil* (1612), Vittoria. Facing her conviction, she daringly defies the notions that the judges attach to her and thus demarcates her personality: "terrify babes, my lord, with painted devils,/I am past such needless palsy,. For you names / Of 'whore' and 'murderess', they proceed from you" (III, ii, 150-152).

27 As Daileader argues, in some recent performances of the play, directors have depicted the Duchess's transcendent voice as a complete resurrection from the dead, making the Duchess return "to stand onstage through the final act, a spectral presence…silently meting out justice" (1998, 90)
by being still visible as spectral, acting bodies on the stage. This role appears to be reserved to male characters, such as the dead Don Andrea in Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* who is visible on stage as a spirit commenting upon the events, and the staged ghost of Hamlet's father, who persuades his son to avenge his murder. However, while the Duchess's body is erased from the stage – the site of her sexual unruliness thus being properly eliminated–she is still a discursive presence.

As this voice from beyond the grave– a status which Renaissance theatre directors may have emphasised by presenting the audience an audible voice as well–the Duchess transcends the silencing that was imposed upon her through her murderers. The fact that the Duchess's voice is raised from the dead, appears to refer to Christ's resurrection, for the text contains many allusions to Christ in relation to the Duchess. For example, the Duchess's remarks that she would make the world return "to its first chaos" (IV, i, 98) if Bosola killed her, alludes to the darkness that came over the earth when Christ was crucified. Her subsequent allegation "I long to bleed" also appears to be an allusion to Christ, who bled for the sins committed by mankind. The use of Christian discourses in the representation of the Duchess serves to legitimise her outspokenness, which her immoral brothers reject. The analogy between the Duchess and Christ that is suggested underlines the capacity of her voice to transcend death and defy the silencing that her brothers impose upon her.

3.3. Caroline Tragedy and Tragedy from the Civil War Period: ‘Tis Pity She’s a Whore, *The Broken Heart, The Politician*.

3.3.1. Woman's "Magic Tongue" and English Drama, 1625-1649.

On the whole Jacobean tragedy endorsed the dominant equation of female utterance with sexual incontinence. Yet, in some tragic plays, such as *Othello* and *The Duchess of Malfi*, contradictory discourses were developed which dismantled the culturally approved perceptions on woman's voice. These alternative discourses on woman's voice were gaining some territory in the tragic texts written over the next few decades. However, in James Shirley's *The Politician* (ca. 1639) the cultural stereotype of the luxurious outspoken woman is confirmed. Marpisa conforms to the stereotype of the lascivious, wordy woman. She is

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28 Thus Clark's assumption that some seventeenth-century playwrights granted women voice and power while depicting them as virtuous, also seems to apply to Webster's tragedy. See Clark, 1990, 64.
bound by marital contract to the king, yet she makes a cuckold out of him by paying the politician Gotharus "fair conditions" (III, iii) in return for Gotharus's help in introducing her to the king and socially advancing her. Ill-reputed for her wanton conduct, at the same time Marpisa possesses a verbal power through which she is said to cast a spell on others, and is very assertive in her speeches. Olaus, the king's uncle, believes that Marpisa had "charm'd" her former husband Altomarus "by the flattery and magic of her… tongue" (III, i), and openly accuses her of making "an idol" of "the device of tongue and soft phrases…to disguise her heart" (III, i). Albinia, Gotharus's legitimate wife, proves to be the complete opposite of Marpisa in this respect. Contrary to the queen, she behaves as an honourable, chaste wife. She never asserts her voice to accuse her husband of the wrongs that he does to her. Albinia being reticent and pure, Shirley uses two female foil characters to confirm the ideological notion that the silent woman is chaste and the voiced woman wanton.

Two contrasting discourses on woman's speech also appear in Ford's *Tis Pity She's a Whore* (published in 1633). Not surprisingly in view of her name, Putana voices a great experience on sexual matters as well as wantonness, so that woman's speech and sexual promiscuity are linked. For instance, she suggests to Annabella that she does not feel attracted to Grimaldi the soldier: "not one amongst twenty of your skirmishing captains but have some privy maim or others that mars their standing upright" (I, ii, 83-86). Furthermore, once she has surrendered to Giovanni's lust for her, Annabella is transformed from a reticent girl into a woman who is rude and bold in her speeches. Soranzo defines her speeches as "scornful taunts" that "neither become your modesty or years" (III, ii, 39). The conventional equation of the female voice with sexual looseness is also questioned, for in the play it is man's speech which is mainly associated with wanton drives and loose conduct. According to the friar Giovanni ought to “wash every word thou utter'st”, because he “converse[s] with lust”(I, i, 58, 72). Put differently, he should purify his words which testify of his illegitimate, boundless lust for Annabella. 29

In Ford's *The Broken Heart* (1633) the conventional association of woman's voice with wantonness is undermined. Calantha does not feel inhibited in expressing her sexual preference for Ithocles in presence of her father. For instance, she daringly asks her father if she “may… propose a suit”, praying him to “give me this young man”(IV, iii, 76-78), instead of silently waiting for her father to choose a husband for her. Although she is not afraid to raise her voice, Calantha is constant rather than fickle in bestowing her affections. When

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29 According to Ilse Born-Lechleitner, the "moral taint" of Annabella and Giovanni is "increased by the fact that their love is incestuous as well as adulterous" (1995, 317).
Ithocles dies, Calantha feels she should follow Ithocles in death to remain faithful to him: “Thus I new marry him whose wife I am; Death shall not separate us”(V, iii, 66). The combination of sexual faithfulness and assertive speech that one finds in Calantha indicates a subversion of the dominant view that outspoken women are sexually loose.

3.3.2. Controlling the Female Tragic Subject.

When one analyses the extent to which subjectivity is granted to the female characters, one must conclude that *The Broken Heart* leaves women more scope than Ford’s other tragedy. In the wooing scene with Soranzo, Annabella clearly controls the conversation, manipulating existing discourses on woman’s sexuality as the means to fashion a self-image. When Soranzo argues with her about the bastard child in her womb, Annabella implies that her child was begotten by a high spiritual being: "The man,/ The more than man that got this sprightly boy—/...This noble creature was in every part so angel-like, so glorious" (IV, iii, 31-46). The expressions "more than man" and "angel-like" create the impression that Annabella was impregnated by a God-like creature. Her remark seems to allude to the account in the scriptures of Mary's virginal impregnation by God. Annabella's use of these allusions suggests that she deliberately overturns the meanings of concepts in this scene in order to legitimise her transgressions of the norms of gender. She can be both the sexually defiled woman that she is and the chaste maid that society desires her to be, by adopting the discursive identity of the Virgin Mary.30 Whereas Annabella at times succeeds in managing the process of signification concerning herself, and challenging the cultural categorisation of women as either chaste virgins or fallen, sexually spoilt daughters of Eve, she proves to lose this cognitive control completely. This is best illustrated by the scene in which Giovanni attempts to persuade his sister to make love to him, Giovanni arguing that his animal desire for his sister can be excused, as her “lips would tempt a saint; such hands as those,/ Would make an anchorite lascivious”(I, ii, 212-213). What occurs here is that Giovanni signifies Annabella’s body as corrupting sexual purity, whereas, ironically, it is he who seeks to spoil Annabella’s sexual innocence.

Soranzo and Giovanni are unable to know Annabella, and both conceive of this inability to discover her interior successfully as a traumatic experience in relation to their

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30 According to Alison Findlay, Annabella “does not have the power to fashion herself, She can only negotiate a pathway between the various roles laid out for her by the male characters”(1999, 25). This reading is balanced by what I have just made clear, namely that at some points Annabella is in control over the process of signifying herself, although she can only resort to the patriarchal images of the virgin and the whore in mapping out herself.
masculine identities. For example, being misled by the image of the pure, virginal woman who would “live and die a maid” (III, ii, 21) that Annabella presents to him, Soranzo praises himself lucky, feeling that he has engaged himself with a woman who is sexually unspoilt. Finding out that he has married a defiled woman afterwards, Soranzo's masculine honour is damaged. Confronting Annabella with her pregnancy, Soranzo unsuccessfully tries to learn the name of her lover and father to her bastard child from Annabella: "Not know it, strumpet! I'll rip up thy heart/ And find it there" (IV, iii, 51-52). Annabella's past being an unfathomable secret for Soranzo, Giovanni does not manage to control his sister's heart either. Her decision to give up their affair comes as a complete surprise for him: "What, changed so soon?" (V, v, 1).

Both Annabella's brother and her husband later undermine her status as the unknown, discovering subject. For example, Giovanni hides his plan to kill his sister from her, pretending that he will kiss her in order to stab her to death. Subsequently, he literally carves the place where Annabella’s interior is settled, her heart, out of her body, and holds it up to be viewed by Soranzo, Florio and Vasques, uttering: “‘Tis Annabella’s heart; ‘tis; why d'ee startle?/ I vow ‘tis hers; this dagger’s point plough’d up/ Her fruitful womb, and left to me the fame/ Of a most glorious executioner”(V, vi, 32-35). Possessing Annabella's heart, Giovanni is literally in control over his sister's interior, while the heart of the previously undiscoverable Annabella is simultaneously exposed to the theatre audience.31 The verb "plough up" indicates that Giovanni makes Annabella infertile, using his iron dagger to destroy the fruit that he had conceived in her womb by means of his physical "dagger", his phallus. Giovanni makes Annabella's inwardness publicly known, hence, containable. Giovanni's destruction of “her fruitful womb”(V, vi, 34) also suggests that he symbolically eliminates her potential for interiority.

When one considers the female characters in the play as "narrative plotters", one notices that their narrative control is appropriated from them, and that the plots that they construct fail. In Annabella’s case, Giovanni implies that she masters his fate, claiming that it is “my destiny that you must either love, or I must die” (I, ii, 241). In fact, however, he exerts authority over the story of her life by killing her. By contrast, in The Broken Heart the female characters manage to exercise more control over their lives. Penthea manages to fashion her own fate. The men in her life all endeavour to direct her existence in accordance with their

31 This scene suggests a revision of the Petrarchan "conceit of the exchange of hearts" (John, 1994, 98) between lovers: Giovanni literally appropriates Annabella's heart, instead of letting her decide on whom she wishes to bestow her heart. Furthermore, he does not offer Annabella possession over his heart in return.
wishes. Ithocles intervenes in the "plot" of her love life by marrying her off to Bassanes, Orgilus attempts to suggest the plot of an elopement to her, and Bassanes forces a story-line of an unsatisfied, restricted life upon her. Nevertheless Penthea ultimately manages to break free from their control by "writing" her own conclusion. Penthea's gaining authority over her life by plotting her death is rather ironic, however. On the one hand, her suicide signifies a sense of autonomy. In contrast with Ornstein who feels that Penthea is admitting the vileness of her marriage, Penthea's determination to starve herself can also be read as a refusal to comply with the patriarchal restrictions that have been placed upon her. In this respect, Penthea's fasting, a deliberate emptying of the body, may be regarded as a refusal to take in the plots that the men around her have in mind for her, which so far governed her existence and caused her frustration.

On the other hand, Penthea's starvation of herself may signal her loss of self-determination. Being a woman, there does not seem to be a choice for Penthea but either to resign to the limited, rule-bound, miserable existence that is available to her or to escape from it through death. There are some similarities between Penthea and Calantha in that both women suffer from the pains of love, and in that their deaths are analogous. Exclaiming “Command the voices/ Which wait at th'altar now to sing the song/ I fitted for my end” (V, iii, 78-80) Calantha exhibits autonomy over her life, since she provides stage directions for the conclusion of her existence. It is intriguing that the end of the song is simultaneous with the moment of Calantha's death, for it suggests that she also determines the moment of silence, instead of having her command over her voice smothered by the androcentric world around her.

As I have pointed out, The Politician presents two contrasting female characters. The vile woman Marpisa is granted more space to assert her voice by the male characters than Albinia, and she exerts more control over the process of signification. Contrary to Albinia, Marpisa appropriates the right to raise her voice when the outside world attempts to signify her. When Olaus openly publicises the wrongs she did her former husband in Marpisa's own presence, the queen assertively speaks up to undermine the negative significations that Olaus places upon her person. She desires that "these black aspersions; May be examin'd further, and the Author, called to make proof of such a passionate language” (III, i), and suggests

32 Catherine Belsey argues that at the end of the scene in which Orgilus meets Penthea by accident, he "makes an unspecified physical overture, which is at once repulsed" (1985, 209).
33 As Tomlinson argues, "paradoxically, the moment in which Calantha commands her heartstrings to crack is at once a display of supreme self-control and emotional abandon. The spectacular breaking of her heart represents inward feeling made outward, subjectivity made theatrical" (1999, 65).
Olaus “may be abus’d by some malicious tale, Fram’d to dishonour me” (III, i). Marpisa's final appearance in the play also marks a re-appropriation of command over her life and the course of events. By revealing the secret of his bastard birth to Haraldus, Gotharus deviates from the plan that Marpisa had in mind concerning her son, replacing it by a "plot" of his own. Realising that "Again Gotharus….plotted this" against her will, Marpisa is resolved to take revenge upon her lover. She seeks to re-appropriate the position of the author of plots: "his fate is next" (IV, iii). This resolution culminates in success, as the plot that she plans for destroying Gotharus reaches the desired climax. Yet, it should be noted that in this play the wanton, wordy woman is again punished by losing her maternity.

3.3.3. The Tragic Closure and the Issue of Transgression.

Marpisa's final appearance on the stage is intriguing, as her ending differs from the tragic fate reserved for wanton, outspoken female characters. Towards the end of the play Marpisa possesses rather than loses authorial control: not just over the lives of others, but essentially over her own existence. When Olaus gives the command to "shoot" Marpisa "presently", and "let some strangle her in her own hair" (V, ii), Marpisa states that she will not let Olaus "have the honour… to kill me" (V, ii). Instead, being "mistress" of her "fate" (V, i), she has taken a poison which will "gently seize upon" her "vitals" (V, ii) and thus will end her life out of her own accord. Moreover, the defiant queen transcends death, as her passing away is accompanied by memorialising rituals. Aware of her betrayal, the king wants to throw Marpisa out of his court, and make her "get to some wilderness peopled with serpents" (V, i). This situation reminds one of God's banishment of Eve from Eden, in particular when considering the image of the "serpents" (V, i). Although Marpisa is thus associated with Eve, and relegated to a place of oblivion by the king, at the end of the play she is nevertheless allowed a memorial space within culture. Referring to Marpisa's and Gotharus's dead bodies, the king's son, Turgesius, commands: "Let them have burial" (V, ii).

Notably, Albinia does not reach a similar level of transcendence in the face of death. In the act of dying Albinia does not manage to reconstruct herself as different from the significations that Gotharus imposed upon her. She feels that she should once again prove her

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34 As John Flood points out, in Early Modern drama dealing with the fall, Satan was often depicted as a "female-headed serpent" (2000, 204), which is interesting in the light of Marpisa's representation as a serpent-like
faithfulness to Gotharus, following him in death to be reunited with him: "The sad Albinia must sleep by her lord" (V, ii). In addition, Gotharus seems to command Albinia's life from beyond the grave. This becomes clear from the expression "I feel death coming" (V, ii); a sentence which implies that Albinia is destined to die without having the means or desire to resist her end.

Ford's 'Tis Pity She's a Whore displays the conventional tragic pattern according to which the threat of the verbally assertive, wanton woman to masculine power and identity is eliminated. Putana is gagged by Vasques's men, before she is eternally silenced by death. Annabella ends up as silenced and controlled by Giovanni, his cutting out of her heart symbolising his erasure of her potential for subjectivity. In addition, Annabella is denied any transcendence over death. The scene in which Giovanni stabs her is marked by absence of a final moment of self-assertion. Her final speech counts only a few lines, and consists of an imploration to heaven rather than a statement of her identity: "Forgive him, Heaven- and my sins; farewell….Mercy, great heaven" (V, v, 92). Although Annabella voices regrets at her deed and thus in a sense overcomes her transgression, the scope of transcendence that she is granted in the play is limited. In this respect, there is a contrast with her brother Giovanni, who, despite his villainy, is granted a last moment of glorious self-assertion:

*Soranzo:* "...Hadst thou a thought T'outlive thy murders?"
*Giovanni:* "Yes, I tell thee yes; For in my fists I bear the twists of life". (V, vi, 71-74)

This differences between Annabella and Giovanni in the extent to which they are granted subjectivity in their final appearance on stage, shows that Ford uses a double gender standard in representing sexual transgression. Although Annabella is denied tragic transcendence in the play, this does not hold completely for Hippolita. She raises her voice to curse Soranzo, because he made her adulterous while neglecting his vows to her: "may thy bed of marriage be a rack unto thy heart...mayst thou live to father bastards" (IV, ii, 99-101). Ironically, Hippolita's curse proves to come true in that Soranzo is indeed faced with a wife, who is already pregnant by her brother. Consequently, his initial marital bliss is destroyed. Hippolita's curse being effected, she appears to "speak" from beyond the grave.
3.4. Early Restoration Tragedy: The Villain and The Rival Queens.

3.4.1. "Blaspheming Tongues" and Innocent Voices on the Early Restoration Stage.

The first entrance of actresses on the English stage, which allegedly took place around December 15 1660, was accompanied by an increased sexualisation of female characters in plays.35 Elizabeth Howe contends that early Restoration dramatists would "exploit sexually the new female presence in the theatre" (1992, 45), by depicting a greater number of sexually conscious women, and by including rape as one of the major themes in their dramatic plots. As she claims, "the actresses caused rape to become for the first time a major feature of English tragedy" (43), because rape offered the possibility to stage sexually titillating scenes by affording the "means of exposing naked female flesh" (1992, 45). Likewise, Jean Marsden and Laura Rosenthal point to the more frequent occurrence of rape in Restoration drama as a result of the introduction of actresses. Rosenthal mentions Nahum Tate's rewriting of Shakespeare's King Lear (1681) in which Cordelia insists on "her own sexual and affective subjectivity" (1996, 212) by desiring to choose her own lover, as well as becoming the victim of a near rape. Marsden reveals that in Restoration drama the heroine "is established as eroticized object of desire" (1996, 187), not just because she can be gazed at by the male characters and the audience, but also through rape scenes in which the woman's "activity–even resistance– is read as complicity, seduction rather than rape" (1996, 190).

One can speak of an increased eroticisation of female characters in Restoration drama, in combination with the fact that actresses, as sexualised women, uttered their voices in the public arena of the stage. In view of this new phenomenon, one would expect that the equation of woman's speech with wantonness would be intensified in early Restoration tragedy. However, this does not prove to be true. In fact, the semantic dissociation between woman's speech and sexual incontinence that developed in Jacobean tragedies as well as in Caroline tragedy, comes to play an even more prominent role in these early Restoration plays. Thomas Porter's The Villain (1662) and Nathaniel Lee's The Rival Queens (1677) are cases in point.

In The Villain the dominant discourses which associate woman's speech with wantonness come up frequently, and are central to the relationships that the female characters

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35 In a letter by Andrew Newport to Sir Richard Leveson, dated 15 December 1660, it is mentioned that "Upon our stages we have women actors, as beyond seas" (quoted in Shapiro, 1994, 186-87). This statement is generally regarded as the first recorded evidence of women actors performing on the public stage in England.
have with their male relatives. For example, Bellmont is encouraged by her brother to display a feminine modesty of looks and speech in public, as, otherwise, she would risk her reputation. At the same time that these dominant discourses on woman's voice are cited in the play, they are deconstructed. For one thing, the equation of female discourse to promiscuity that is evoked by male characters in the play is revealed to stem from wicked plans to destroy men whom these male characters envy. Anyone who reads Porter's play will be struck by the similarities between the character of Maligni and Shakespeare's Iago. Like Iago Maligni seeks to bring down his male enemy by suggesting to Beaupres that his wife Bellmont is adulterous. Both villains endeavour to "prove" these women's inconstancy by marking their discourse as a sign of wantonness. Maligni creates the illusion that Bellmont is unfaithful by referring to her capacity for discourse and communication. He produces a feigned letter in falsified handwriting, which is addressed to Bellmont, containing amorous offers to Bellmont. By thus connecting Bellmont's potential to receive a letter- which ironically places her in the position of the passive reader rather than the active writer- Maligni schemes to convince Beaupres of his spouse's infidelity. In other words, the construction of the woman who is involved with promiscuous discourse is exposed by Porter as "men's blaspheming Tongues/Against so fair an Innocence!" (H2v).

Beaupres readily believes that his wife's alleged involvement in a correspondence signals sexual incontinence. Yet, in Porter's play, as in Othello, the assumption that woman's speech is accompanied by loose morals is exposed as a figment of the anxious male mind. In the same scene Beaupres states that he would "rather have my wife 'twice ravish'd/ Then once dare think the means how she may act it" (M2r). His phrase indicates that he experiences unease about the possibility that his wife may take on the role of sexual agent, and consequently, deprive him of masculine control. Apart from this, sexual incontinence is related to man's rather than woman's tongue. The male characters use their eloquence for wanton ends, in that they try to talk women into sexual intercourse. They make promises and smoothe things over with phrases in order to seduce young maids. The association of speech with vile lust appears to be particularly personified by the villain Maligni. The words that he uses to plead his amorous cause to Bellmont are so immodest and sexually immoral, that Bellmont considers it "unfit… to hear/ Discourses of this Nature" (I2r). In contrast with the men's promiscuous tongues, the voices of the female characters are associated with innocence and purity. For instance, Bellmont views Charlotte's freedom of speech as proof of her sexual innocence. As she argues: "Your freeness speaks how innocent you are,/ Far more than all tricks of a forc'd dissembling" (F2r).
In *The Rival Queens* the dominant notions of female utterance are subverted in a similar way. Throughout the tragedy the main protagonist's voice is depicted as the instrument through which he manages to fulfil his sexual desires. His wife Statira fears that she will forgive Alexander for his adultery, and no longer forswear his bed, once he begins using his smooth tongue to work upon her:

> Then he will talk, good gods, how he will talk!…
> He speaks the kindest words and looks such things
> Vows with such passion, swears with so much grace
> That 'tis a kind of heaven to be deluded by him. (I, ii, 46-52)

Likewise, Alexander's mistress Roxana asserts that she was trapped into the extramarital affair with Alexander by his charming, eloquent speeches: "So will thy tongue undo all womankind" (III, i, 307-309). Read in the light of Alexander's use of eloquence to achieve his wanton ends, his reproach to Roxana that she drew him into the relationship by practising the "magic" of her tongue seems to undermine rather than endorse the conventional equation of woman's utterance with sexual flagrancy. His angry comments display a projection of his own wantonness and abuse of eloquence.

At the same time that the male hero's voice is associated with seduction and adultery, Roxana's assertive voice is not depicted as proof of a wanton nature. Roxana often asserts her voice in an aggressive way: "hear me speak/ And mark me well, for fate is in my breath" (IV, i, 104-105). Yet, despite her verbal aggressiveness Roxana does not embody the "monstrous" wanton, witty woman. Not only is she represented as the woman who is wronged by Alexander's lust, but she also convincingly argues that her wordiness cannot be conceived as evidence of a boundless sexual desire. As she says to Cassander:

> You thought, perhaps, because I practiced charms
> To gain the king, that I had loose desires
> No, if I were wanton, I would make
> Princes the victims of my raging fires. (IV, i, 188-200)

Put differently, if she really had had a wanton mind, Roxana would not have remained faithful to the king, but tried her sexual charms on other, more powerful men.

### 3.4.2. Subjectivity and Gender in Early Restoration Tragedy.

The representation of Roxana in Lee's tragedy upsets the conventional equation of female speech with sexual promiscuity. Nevertheless, Roxana still conforms to the tragic stereotype of the wordy woman who is eventually deprived of her command over language and the plot. At the beginning of the tragedy Roxana possesses the ability to assert her voice despite Alexander's efforts to silence her. At this stage of the plot Roxana manages to be in command
of her own identity as well. Cassander "hoped to turn" Roxana "all into Medea" (I, ii, 310-11), that is, wished to make Roxana so vengeful that she would turn against Alexander, his personal enemy. Yet, Roxana refuses to take on the role of fury that Cassander had in store for her. She will not "help our [their] party" (II, i, 61) by harming Alexander personally, but wishes to destroy his lawful wife Statira.

At the end of the play Roxana exclaims: "And that the memory of Roxana's wrongs may be forever printed in your mind" (IV, i, 101-102). In other words, she wishes to remain a discursive presence in Alexander's thoughts. Despite Roxana's longing to signify herself as "presence", Alexander denies her the status that she aims at. His remark "let her not be named" (III, i, 427) shows that he relegates her to the feminine realm of silence and forgetfulness. He imposes a figurative death upon her by denying her any existence in speech. Roxana also loses narrative control in her role of plotter. Although she succeeds in her plot of mortally wounding Statira, Roxana's aim to win back Alexander fails utterly. It is Alexander who achieves direction over Roxana's fate in their final meeting. She must submissively "fly forever" from Alexander's "sight" when he commands: "Fly with thy pardon, lest I call it back" (V, i, 218-225). Disappearing from Alexander's life, Roxana simultaneously disappears from the stage, thus being erased from the theatrical scene.

Notably, the feminine Statira is granted a subjectivity which even transcends her death. Statira is confronted with the fact that she embodies the failing, abandoned wife, who is gossiped about by the community. Nevertheless she manages to overcome her lack of control. Instead of submitting to a representation in the communal discourse which issued from Alexander's misstep rather than her own, Statira decides to "publish" her determination to abstain from Alexander's bed "through all the court" (I, ii, 95-97). Statira thus manages to transcend the lack of control over her representation in gossip and creates her own public image. Moreover, she takes over narrative control from Alexander. Despite Alexander's pleas for resumed intimacy and apologies for his mistake, she sticks to her determination not to sleep with him anymore: "My loved lord, I cannot see you thus;/ Nor can I ever yield to share your bed" (III, i, 359-60). By thus forswearing Alexander's bed and ignoring his pleas, Statira becomes the controller rather than the controlled object of their relationship. The discursive and narrative command that she develops in relation to Alexander in the course of the play even extends beyond death. Bending over his mortally wounded wife, Alexander wants Statira to listen to his speeches and answer his questions, and, in this way, tries to direct her discourse: "Close not thy eyes./Things of import I have to speak before/Thou tak'st thy
journey" (V, i, 163-167). Statira, however, has already passed away. Consequently, she escapes the grasp that Alexander endeavours to achieve over her speeches and silences.

In contrast with Lee's heroine Statira, the female characters in *The Villain* hardly enjoy any discursive or narrative control. In fact, the male characters in the play frequently interrupt the women's speeches, stop their mouths, direct the "plots" of the women's lives, and control their representations in society. Both Maligni and Brisac constrain Bellmont's utterance. Brisac obviously restrains Bellmont's potential to express herself and become involved in communication. This becomes apparent in the scene in which he confesses his love for Charlotte to her. As Bellmont wittily remarks, Brisac does not speak to her: "your thoughts are/Some-where else" (F1v). In other words, although he appears to open up his interior to his sister and allow her to pry into the secrets of his heart, at the same time he denies her the role of conversation partner by uttering a kind of soliloquy addressed to the air and the theatre audience. Thus, he places her outside discourse. When he grants her the role of speaker in the end, as the person who has to intercede between him and Charlotte, it is only as his mouthpiece, the empty vessel that is to render his sentences the way he spoke them. This is revealed by his assertion: "And can you well describe my passion, Sister?/ For I would have the Copy that you draw/ Come very near the sad Original" (F1v).

3.4.3. The Early Restoration Tragic Closure and the Issue of Memory.

In general the female characters in *The Villain* do not obtain any control over their voices, nor are they in command of their fate. Quite surprisingly, therefore, the women characters still display some narrative and discursive control at the moments of their deaths. Although Brisac demands that Charlotte live after his death, so that she can keep his memory alive and he may "live in you" (L2v), Charlotte sticks to her determination that she "will not long out-live you" (L2). She refuses to live on now that her beloved has deceased: "I will sing myself…into his blest Society ….Hey,ho! Break thou foolish heart" (L2v). At a first glance, Charlotte's death reminds one of Calantha's in Ford's *The Broken Heart*. It suggests that she misses the ability to construct an independent existence apart from her beloved. On the one hand it would be right to argue that Charlotte's self-willed death thus marks a lack of control over the plot of her life. On the other hand, one can also regard her act of singing herself to death as a moment at which she constructs her own fate rather than follows the plot directions that others had in mind for her.
Bellmont manages to transcend her former lack of control over her representation when she dies. Stating "But when I am gone/Believe my Honour still as fair" (N2v), Bellmont represents herself as sexually pure. Thus, she projects a self-image of her own making.

Ironically, Bellmont and Charlotte only enjoy moments of discursive and narrative control shortly before their voices are silenced for good. Whereas in the play the male characters are memorialised after their deaths, the female characters are not. Charlotte complies with Brisac's command to "be kind unto my memory….Remember then, Pray remember often" (L2v), since she claims: "Whilst memory retains a place…each breath I draw, and every bow I make,/Shall be for my Brisac" (L2v). By contrast, the two women are not memorialised in such a way. It is almost as if similar rites are never provided for the female sex, as becomes apparent in Charlotte's questioning whether her father ever commemorated her mother: "did you lament my Mother so?" (M1r).

Lee's Statira is placed at the centre of memorialising rites when she has passed away. Alexander orders to "put the world in mourning?/ Tear all your robes" and "To build her tomb no shrines nor altars spare" (V, i, 264-273). Furthermore, in the moment before breathing her last Lee allows Statira the possibility to assert her voice, and pass on her last wishes to Alexander: "leave not the earth / Before heav'n calls you. Spare Roxana's life;/ 'Twas love of you that caused her give me death" (V, iv, 156-159). The desire that she voices is observed by Alexander who spares Roxana's life. Since the plot that Statira unfolds in her final words actually comes true, it can be concluded that Statira's narrative control transcends death.

As we have seen, unlike Statira, Roxana is condemned to eternal oblivion. Alexander commands her to disappear from his sight forever and she remains unnamed for the rest of the play. That Roxana is thus committed to a figurative "death" rather than a real execution may have to do with the fact that Restoration tragedy displayed more sympathy for the villainess than earlier drama, as Rothstein contends.36 Theorists of Restoration tragic drama developed a "non rhetorical, affective theory of tragedy" (Rothstein, 1978, 9), which emphasises the need for tragedy to appeal to "compassion" (1978, 11). As a result of this view of tragedy, the stock character of the lustful villainess altered, in that she is treated "psychologically, with moral understanding" (1978, 140), and in that her energies derive "less from unscrupulous passion than regal position" (1978, 140). The character of Roxana is indeed approached with sympathy and understanding by Lee. Roxana's rage is shown to issue mainly from the fact that Alexander has abandoned her in her delicate condition: "may the illustrious blood that

fills my womb/ And ripens to be perfect godhead born,/Come forth a fury" (III, i, 129-131). Therefore, the approach taken to Roxana in the play is attenuated through her being represented as pregnant.

3.5. Tragic Female Subjectivity: A Conclusion.

The dominant discourse defining woman's speech as a sign of sexual incontinence, left a prominent mark on Elizabethan tragedy. Tragedies from this period represent outspoken female characters like Tamora and Alice Arden as decidedly wanton. At the same time that these tragedies endorse the view of outspoken women as sexually immoral, they suggest that a woman's potential for sexual transgression may also be covered up in silence, and hence, may be something that escapes the male mind. The women in these Elizabethan tragedies first possess semantic control over the representations of themselves and others, and even manage to reverse the meaning of established concepts and discourses which underline conventional gender norms, such as biblical metaphors. However, later on in the play they end up as defined objects who are deprived of their authority over the process of signification. Furthermore, the women in these tragedies frequently lack sufficient knowledge to fathom the intentions and plans of other characters. The conventional gender roles of the men as the knowing subjects, and the women as the known objects, are restored in the end. Apart from this, whereas Alice Arden and Tamora at first exercise control over the direction of the plot, in the course of the tragedies they fail to reach the ends that they had envisaged, and are forced to surrender control over the plots of their lives as well. Losing authority over the process of representation, the direction of the plot and the communication of knowledge, these women are robbed of those qualities which first marked them as subjects.

The loss of the function of subjects that these women suffer is underlined by their subsequent annihilation. All the female characters in the tragedies under discussion die by the end of the play. Thus, the women whose conduct is inappropriate are eliminated towards the tragic closure. The portrayal of women's deaths in the three Elizabethan tragedies highlights their loss of subjectivity, since the women are not allowed the opportunity to assert their own identities before they die. By contrast, the male villain Aaron is granted the possibility of establishing his identity through speech before he dies. Therefore one can speak of a double standard in the treatment of social transgression. Furthermore, in the case of Tamora, the assertive, sexually incontinent woman is punished severely by the death of her offspring. In addition, as women who overstep the gender norms through their discursive and sexual
activity, Alice and Tamora are denied memorialising rituals. Thus, the threat that these eloquent, sexually active women pose to men's discursive and sexual control is properly annihilated. The example of Bel-Imperia, who shapes her own death plot, makes clear that the only narrative control that women are allowed to retain is suicide. It is probably because Bel-Imperia is still presented as a rather virtuous, albeit outspoken woman, that she is granted this autonomy over her death. The wicked, adulterous Tamora and Alice have their lives "ended" by others, against their own "narrative" will.

The dominant discourse which associates woman's utterance with sexual promiscuity also predominates in Jacobean tragedy. Heroines like Beatrice Joanna and Evadne embody the cultural spectre of the woman who is both loose of tongue and sexually immoral. Furthermore, in Jacobean tragedies the outspoken female characters who were at one time in command over meaning and plot, end up silenced, dead, exposed, controlled and signified by others. One difference from Elizabethan tragedy is that woman's sexual dishonour is also increasingly connected with silence and secrecy. In *The Changeling* and *The Maid's Tragedy* woman's wantonness remains initially unknown to the male characters, who are subsequently entrapped in marriages with women who are sexually dishonourable. At the tragic closure these men discover the true natures of these women, and regain control over these women's lives and their own existence, by castigating them. Yet, the risk that men run to lose command over the exchange of knowledge and the production of meaning when confronted with the wordy, wanton woman is fully explored.

Like their transgressive Elizabethan "sisters", Beatrice Joanna and Evadne are safely put to death at the tragic closure. Being stuck away in the closet, Beatrice Joanna is symbolically turned into an object whose meaning can be "confined" again. Besides, her confinement in the closet indicates how society tries to lock away the shame and transgression that she represents, and exclude them from civilisation. In this respect, Beatrice Joanna's death in the closet is analogous to the allocation of Tamora's corpse to the wilderness, since it expresses the other characters' desire to obliterate her from memory. Similarly, Evadne is refused mourning ceremonies by her brother, who expresses more grief over his friend's death than his sister's.

At the same time that the dominant ideology on the female speaking subject plays such a major role in Jacobean tragedies, some of these plays also contain subversive, alternative gender discourses on speech. In *Othello* and *The Duchess of Malfi* it is man's rather than woman's voice which is associated with wantonness and adultery. In both tragedies male characters use their tongues to seduce women, slander women unjustly, and use bawdy
innuendoes in their speeches. By contrast, in these plays woman's voice is often associated with virtue, justice, and the purification of a woman's reputation that has been slandered unjustly. Furthermore, in *Othello* and *The Duchess of Malfi* the idea of the speaking, sexually incontinent female is displayed as a projection of the wanton male mind. The ways in which Iago, Ferdinand and the Cardinal signify the women around them, and the role of prostitutes in which they cast these women, signal their own lustful nature. In addition, the idea of the talkative, sexually loose woman is exposed in the two plays as a product of the anxious male mind who wishes to remain in control of the female sex, rather than as a reality. In both tragedies, emphasis is laid upon the need for the male characters to monumentalise women, that is, their desire to murder women in order to turn them into unchangeable, cold "statues", that can be controlled sexually because of their static nature. By stressing the male characters' desire for monumentalisation in order to alleviate their own insecurity, Webster and Shakespeare question the legitimacy of the dominant ideology of the voiceless female. Although these plays partly question and challenge the dominant discourse on woman's speech, at the same time the female characters in the play lose their discursive control, and are not granted the possibility to transcend their ultimate silencing in death. An exception in this respect is the Duchess of Malfi who can speak from beyond the grave.

The trends in the representation of the female speaking subject that one finds in Jacobean tragedy developed in tragedies written during the Caroline period and the Civil War. Although the cultural spectre of the outspoken, sexually incontinent woman is impersonated by female characters such as Marpisa, Hippolyta, Annabella and Putana, at the same time sexual transgression is associated specifically with male speech. As in some Jacobean tragic plays, woman's wantonness is not only identified with female speech, but also represented as an impenetrable secret through which men are victimised. In *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* Fotf emphasises that woman's discursive power may deprive men of their control over the meaning that can be attributed to a woman, and may evoke man's anxiety about his gendered identity. The play is similar to *Othello* and *The Duchess of Malfi* in the relation that is drawn between the dominant ideology on speech and man's frustration. Yet, unlike the two earlier tragedies, which stress this connection in order to challenge the dominant discourses on woman's voice, Ford's play does not appear to question the idea that outspoken women are wanton.

In tragedies from this period, the sexually and discursively immoral women are deprived of their discursive and narrative control, and they are killed off at the tragic closure. Furthermore, many of the women depicted in the three tragedies, such as Annabella and Putana, are denied any discursive or narrative transcendence over death. The women in *The*
Broken Heart enjoy moments of narrative control in the process of dying, since they fashion their own deaths, and can even narratively construct their deaths in moments of speech and silence. Since the women in this play are sexually virtuous despite their outspokenness, it is not surprising that they still enjoy a degree of autonomy over their deaths. However, in these tragedies there are also two wanton women who are granted transcendence over death. Hippolita expresses a curse which takes effect after her death, so that she extends narrative control over the plot beyond the grave. Another exception to the conventional pattern can be found in Shirley's tragedy. Marpisa, although a villainous bawd, is allowed to assert herself, and fashion her own death.

Although, in the light of the appearance of actresses on stage, one might have expected an intensified equation of female speech with wantonness in Restoration tragedy, this does not prove to be quite the case. In The Villain woman is shown to be wantonised by men's evil and lustful tongues, rather than to be sexually loose by nature; a representation which links the play to Othello and The Duchess of Malfi. In The Rival Queens this deconstruction of the dominant discourse is taken even a step further, in that the verbally assertive woman is represented as sexually contained and constant. Even though these tragedies display criticism towards the dominant view that speaking women are sexually immoral, the female characters are hardly granted any subjectivity. Since the female characters in The Villain do only enjoy some moments of discursive and narrative control on their death-beds, their capacity for discursive agency and narrative construction are ironically related to the moment of death. Furthermore, Roxana has to undergo the fate reserved for the wordy villainesses in tragedies from previous decades. She is rid of her capacity to construct her identity and direct the plot, and becomes obliterated from memory, although she does not die literally. Interestingly, Roxana's foil, the virtuous feminine Statira, is granted discursive and narrative authority to some extent; an authority which even surpasses death. Thus, the more liberal view towards the female speaking subject that comes into being in this period, appears to be only reserved for tragic female characters exhibiting appropriate feminine traits and behaviour.
Part II: "Within these tombs enclosed":
Women and Tragedy, 1570-1642
Figure 4: Charles I and Henrietta Maria as Apollo and Diana by Gerard van Honthorst, 1628 (The Royal Collection, Hampton Court).
Part II: "Within these tombs enclosed": Women and Drama 1570-1642.

In spite of the exclusion of women from the public stage before 1660, between 1570 and 1642 there were some Englishwomen who defied socially imposed gender restrictions by participating in dramatic productions, staged in the more private settings of the court or the houses of the gentry. In this respect, leading roles were taken by the English queens Elizabeth I, Anna and Henrietta Maria. Although Queen Elizabeth I rarely participated in masques as one of the masquers, she implicitly played a part in a great number of dramatic performances. ¹ Elizabeth's royal seat was placed directly on the stage, and, consequently, "what the rest of the spectators watched was not a play, but the queen at a play" (Orgel, 1975, 10). The audience were thus encouraged to interpret the play in relation to her person. In other words, Elizabeth I figured as an "actor" in plays, yet in an appropriately feminine passive way as a silent emblem which affected the meaning of the play staged. Pieces like Ben Jonson's Cynthia's Revels (1600) refer to the queen both as a member of the audience, and as part of the dramatic performance.² In the prologue allusions are made to the setting of Elizabeth I's court in which the actors will perform revels: "O, the night is come (t was somewhat darke, mee thought) and Cynthia intends to come forth…All the courtiers must prouide for revuels; they conclude upon a Masque". The name Cynthia was often used to refer to the queen, but the play also includes a character named Cynthia, whose viewing of revels at her own court parallels queen Elizabeth's dramatic entertainment. Thus, Elizabeth I is indirectly part of the dramatic action. Her role as "actor" in the drama is emphasised by the fact that Elizabeth I is addressed by the actors on stage as "Another CYNTHIA, and another Queene" (V, vi). During her progresses through the country the Virgin Queen often figured as an actress in a dramatic performance. Elizabeth's visits to the households of nobility would be marked by a series of dramatic interludes organised by the host or hostess. For instance, as the queen rode towards Lady Russell's Bisham in 1592, she was welcomed by the Russell daughters dressed as shepherdesses, sitting on a hillside. Subsequently, at the top of the hill going to the house, a wild man came forth and uttered his speech "Your Majesty on my knees will I followe, bearing this Club. Not as Salvage…" (quoted in Wilson, 1958, 44). Being addressed and guided by the dramatis persona of the wild man, Elizabeth unwittingly performed a part in the dramatic performance.³

¹ See Orgel, 1965, 19.
² Hackett remarks that the scenes in this play "look out from the fiction of the stage to the real physical presence of the Queen" (1994, 187)
³ In Nichols's documentation of Elizabeth I's public progresses one finds several other examples of the queen's participation in the dramatic spectacles arranged during her visits. When she came to stay at Kenilworth Castle", Elizabeth I was addressed by an actor in costume representing Triton: "Muse not at all, most mightie prince/ me
Elizabeth I's "acting" did not restrict itself to her presence at dramatic performances: she also cleverly used theatricality in her public, political appearances. Elizabeth I’s processions through the streets were stage-managed, and her coronation pageant was almost like a piece of drama, with both the queen and the city government of London acting according to previously established directions. However, in this pageant the part of the queen was not confined to that of a mere silent presence: in contrast with her role at dramatic performances at court, she delivered speeches. For instance, during her public procession through London in 1558-59, Elizabeth I delivered several speeches which were accompanied with dramatic physical movements, as if she were an actress on stage:

her Grace perceiuing a childe offred to make an oration unto her, stayed her chariot, and did caste up her eyes to heaven, as who should saye: 'I here see thys mercyfull worke towarde the poore, whom I muste in the middest opf my royaltie nedes remembre.  (quoted in Nichols, 1823, I, 55)

Elizabeth took on the subversive role of the speaking actress in her political "performances". This becomes also clear from the fact that, although the queen had at first consented to have her speeches in Parliament read out by a male speaker, in 1566 she herself stood up to speak. In other words, Elizabeth started to adopt the "unfeminine" spoken parts. She desired to have her words and her role expressed by "her own queenly, rather than in another-and male- voice" (Levin, 1998, 120), thus, refusing to be impersonated by a male "actor". Moreover, in her function of Queen of England Elizabeth I was perceived as an actress by her subjects. For instance, in his Historical Memoires on the Reigns of Queen Elizabeth and King James (1658) Sir Francis Osborne voices his criticism of Elizabeth I as a female ruler by pointing to the theatricality of her public performances: "Her Sex did beare out many impertinencies in her words and actions, as her making latin speeches in the Universities, and professing herselfe in publique a Muse, then thought something too Theatrical for a virgine Prince".

Triton floate.." (1823, 499). Thus, she functioned as the audience of the performance and had an active part in the entertainment as a "character".

See Hibbert, 1990, 68.

See Frye, 1993, chapter 1: Engendered Economics: Elizabeth I's Coronation Entry (1559). Interestingly, Stephen Orgel suggests that female characters in Tudor pageants "were by no means always impersonated by boys" (1996, 5). Apparently, in 1519 two young women played "Our Lady" and "St Elizabeth" in a pageant, and in 1534 four ladies played the Virgin Mary and her three attendants. See Orgel, 1996, 5.

Mary Hill Cole argues about Elizabeth I's processions through London: "As Elizabeth enhanced her queenly image and the two sought favors from her, they engaged in a "ceremonial dialogue" that included movements, processions, costumes, gifts, entertainments and speeches...The public exchange of messages between the queen and local officials, merchants and ordinary people, occurred in the ceremony created by these participants to contain such a plurality of voices" (Cole, 1999, 121).

7 Quoted in Tomlinson, 1999, 4.
At the start of the reign of Elizabeth I's successor, James I, the actress was no longer a completely unfamiliar phenomenon. Acting troupes from the continent which included women actors performed plays in London. However, the appearance of these actresses on the stage triggered criticism rather than applause. In 1629 a group of French actresses were hissed and hooted from the stage by the English audience, and, since Englishwomen were still forbidden to perform in the public theatre, female acting was stamped in the public mind as a continental phenomenon. While a female presence on the public stage was condemned, in the private setting of Royal and noble households women actively participated in drama as actresses. However, noble ladies who acted in masques, did not have any spoken parts in these plays. In Robert White's *Cupid's Banishment* (1617) the women of Ladies Hall who performed in the masque merely appeared on the stage as "silent, dancing figures, contrasting with the men who played the female roles of Diana and Occasion" (1996, 80). The masque portrays the women in such a way as to avoid any association of them with wantonness, despite the fact that they display their bodies to the selected public of the hall. Staging "the contrasting possibilities offered by chaste and wanton love", *Cupid's Banishment* shows chaste love to reign supreme (1996, 168). The royal spouse of Elizabeth I's successor James I, queen Anna of Denmark, and her ladies in waiting also performed in several court masques. The role of Pallas Athena that queen Anna played in Samuel Daniel's masque *Vision of the Twelve Goddesses* (1604) was appropriate in that it emphasised her sexual purity. However, the part of Pallas Athena, which suggests female power and which could remind the audience of James I's strong female predecessor, offered Anna the means implicitly to undermine her husband's position as the exclusive locus of government.

Furthermore, Queen Anna's acting can be regarded as controversial, since the masques in which she acted sometimes criticised the use of boy-actors impersonating women in the English public theatre, and constituted a plea for the introduction of actresses. This is the case with "The Masque of Queenes", written for the queen by Ben Jonson, in which the queen and ladies acted on February 2nd 1609. At the time when Jonson wrote this piece of drama, masques conventionally consisted of two parts: a masque representing social ideals and an antimasque undermining these ideals and celebrating chaos. The action of the masque was traditionally concerned with the "ordering of misrule" (Orgel, 1965, 35), the masquers defying the antimasquers. In "The Masque of Queenes" the masque and antimasque structure are

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9 This masque was performed on Sunday, January 8, 1604 at Hampton Court. See Steele, 1926, 136.
related to gender norms. The play begins with the entrance of a couple of witches who are impersonated by male actors. These witches acting out the antimasque represent qualities which were considered unnatural for a woman. The witches and their Dame are not only associated with unchaste conduct, because they are "naked-armed, barefooted", and have their flocks "tucked" (1995, 37, ll. 84-86). They are also related to malicious speech, the mistress of the witches being described as "whetting of her forked tongue" (1995, 38, l. 110). Thus, the male actors impersonate the cultural spectre of the lewd, eloquent woman that undermines the ideal of silent, chaste womanhood. In the second part of the play "misrule" ends and the social status quo is reinstated. These witches are driven from the stage by a group of real women who represent the feminine qualities of virtue and chastity: the Queen and her ladies. They play the parts of women like chaste Zenobia, queen of the Palmyrenes, and "Bel-Anna, royal Queen of the Ocean; of whose dignity and person the whole scope of the invention doth speak throughout" (1995, 50, ll. 596-98). The fact that the male actors are identified with unnatural womanhood and are replaced on the stage by real women who stand for true femininity is significant. The association of the male actors impersonating women with monstrous and wanton qualities implies a challenge to the idea that men ought to perform women's roles on the stage to secure female chastity, and implies criticism on the phenomenon of boy-actors. In other words, the play shows women appropriating the profession of the actor, and thus the masque can be read as a plea for the introduction of the actress. Whereas queen Anne's choice of parts in the masques sometimes seemed to defy the exclusion of women from the public stage, through her voiceless performances she adhered to the gender norms of feminine silence.

Things altered dramatically with the arrival of Henrietta Maria, wife of Charles I, at the English court. Having been accustomed to female actresses on the public stage in her native France and having entertained herself with acting at the French Catholic court, Henrietta Maria commissioned plays and sponsored drama at the English court, and participated in several dramatic productions at court. Yet, Henrietta Maria did not restrict herself to masques, but

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11 Orgel argues that the witches defy not only the order of the natural world, but rhetorical and stylistic order as well. Their language is disorganised language, and the conventional discourses of the masque are used in the antimasque. See Orgel, 1965, 134.
12 Stephanie Hodgson-Wright also alleges: "if we read the masque not simply in terms of what was performed, but in terms of who was performing, when the witches are banished from the stage, male performers impersonating a stereotype of female transgression are banished by female performers whose power is epitomised by inimitable beauty" (Wright, 2000, 47).
13 This confirms Jennifer Chibnall's view that "masques make political statements" (1984, 78).
14 For instance, Henrietta Maria sponsored William Davenant's masque The Temple of Love (1635). See Butler, 1993, 143. See also De Gay, 1998, 26
Women and Drama, 1570-1640

also performed in spoken drama. On Shrove Tuesday 1626, Henrietta Maria took the stage at the English court, acting a French pastoral with the company of her ladies-in-waiting. This performance "was arresting, at once cultural intervention…for until this moment formal acting by women had not been witnessed" (Tomlinson 1992b, 189), that is, English women had not adopted speaking parts as actresses. Henrietta Maria's adoption of spoken parts constituted a transgression of feminine silence, and therefore caused scandal. Yet at the same time she turned female acting into a controversial issue and inspired a growth in women's participation in private theatricals. Her spoken performances eventually paved the way for an increasing tolerance towards women actors. William Prynne attacked the queen's acting, among other topics, in his Histrio-Mastix (1633), denouncing women actors as notorious whores. Prynne was severely punished for his criticism by having his ears cut off.

Although there is no sufficient proof, it has often been suggested that Henrietta Maria was also active as a woman playwright. The Pastorall of Florimene "presented by ’the Queens majestie’s Commandment, before the Kings Maiesty in the Hall at White-hall, on St. Thomas day, the 21 of December 1635’" (Rubik, 1998, 14) is thought to have been composed by Queen Henrietta Maria. If Henrietta Maria was indeed the author of the pastoral play, she was by no means the first woman in Renaissance England who was engaged with writing drama. Around 1550 Lady Joanna Lumley had translated a play by Euripides in English, Iphigenia in Aulis. Forty years later, Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke, translated Robert Garnier's Marc Antoine, and, in contrast with Lumley, whose manuscript only circulated within the circles of nobility, Sidney eventually had her translated drama published. Soon after Sidney's publication of her drama, around 1604, the first original play by an Englishwoman was written, Elizabeth Cary's The Tragedie of Mariam, which was published in 1613. Probably the second woman who wrote an original piece of drama within this period

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15 See Tomlinson, 1992a, 137. In fact, at the time "court drama itself centre[d] on Henrietta Maria rather than Charles, and her courtiers followed her lead" (Boswell, 1932, 28).
16 As is revealed by the casting list of William Davenant's Salmacida Spolia (1640), among the ladies-in-waiting who performed with Henrietta Maria were the Countess of Arundel, the Countess of Derby, Lady Elizabeth Guildford and Lady Anne Clifford.
17 See Gossett 125.
18 Prynne's rejection of the queen's acting also stemmed from his Puritan political views. Puritans rejected theatricality, not just because they associated drama with sensuality, but also because of "the growing hold of the court over the theatre, both in terms of censorship and patronage" (Heinemann, 1980, 21).
19 See Hobby, 1988, 102.
20 In Harbage's annals (1964) the play is also mentioned and attributed to Henrietta Maria, with a question mark. Unfortunately, "the play is available only in its 'argument', that is, story line, not in the original dramatic text, nor have the songs survived" (Rubik, 1998, 14). Steele argues that Henrietta Maria presented Florimene "a most beautiful pastoral to her maids in French" on Monday, December 21, 1635. This suggests that the play was acted out or read in an all female, domestic setting.
was Mary Sidney's niece, Lady Mary Wroth, whose *Love's Victory* (1621) only appeared in manuscript form.

All these plays by Renaissance Englishwomen were written as closet dramas, that is, plays which were "not written for performance but for reading, either alone or within small groups’ (Guttierez, 1991, 236). As a genre, closet drama had already been popular on the Continent, before it was brought into use in England. Since the genre was intended to be read out in a private setting rather than performed on stage, the genre had a narrative character. Because of this narrative nature of the genre, closet drama consisted of loosely connected rhetorical occasions, which "consistent with the purposes of closet drama form, give extended expression to both sides of the dilemma" (Kegl, 1999, 145). In other words, in Renaissance closet dramas subjects were explored through the presentation of arguments in favour of different options, and thus, they consisted of "long speeches delivered antithetically in a mixture of heroic couplets and unrhymed iambic pentameter", in which events were "reported rather than represented" (Weller and Ferguson, 1994, 28). Furthermore, closet drama was strongly influenced by the Senecan ideal of stoicism: a school of philosophy which suggested that the rational sage, unswayed by extreme passions such as envy or fear, would be a free individual in opposition to the slaves of passion. The sage would display indifference and resistance towards tyranny, preserving his or her own integrity when facing oppression.

Around 1590 the composition of noble households had changed. Whereas in the sixteenth century these households had their own acting companies to provide entertainments, this was no longer the case by 1600. The court still had its own group of professional actors for domestic performances, and there were private indoor theatres such as Blackfriar's, opened in 1576, which aimed at exclusive, upper-class audiences. The nobility, having lost their own acting companies, obviously did not want to attend plays or engage with dramatic productions at the vulgar public theatre that was identified with wantonness. Therefore, among the nobility it now became common either to attend plays at one of the private theatre houses or to produce small household performances in which family members were acting parts. For entertainment in these households, drama was often written to be read in solitude, or individual audience members might have gathered in households to hear the play read aloud by a single reader or by a number of readers who adopted characters' roles. Closet drama catered for this need, and thus became a genre readily adopted by many members of the upper classes.

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21 Shannon uses the term "philosophical analysis or rumination" (1994, 145) in her definition of closet drama.
22 See Braden, 1985, chapter one.
Since closet dramas were meant to be read out in the private setting of households instead of performed in public theatrical spaces, it has often been assumed that the genre of closet drama was a specifically "feminine" genre. This assumption has justly been refuted. Nancy Gutierrez, for instance, contends that the argument that closet drama is a specifically woman's genre with a marginal status "contradicts its literary history" (1991, 238), for a great number of upper-class men, such as Daniel, Greville and Alexander, used closet drama as a form of effective mainstream cultural engagement. Taking up closet drama as an expository for political views, these male writers resorted to a form, which enabled them to avoid publication of their texts, as a thing not done for the higher classes. Although English Renaissance closet dramas centralised the private sphere rather than public life, they were strongly concerned with politics, as "a vehicle for direct exposition of political ideas" and "political dissent" (Gutierrez, 1991, 237). The private setting in these closet dramas served as a displacement of the public criticism that was voiced in these plays, which could sometimes be very radical. This is revealed by the fact that, frequently, alterations to the plot had to be made when these plays were to be presented on the stage, after having functioned as closet dramas. For instance, Samuel Daniel was prosecuted by Cecil, and charged with having portrayed the Essex rebellion positively, only when his closet drama Tragedy of Philotas was to be staged in 1604; charges which forced him to revise the play.

Gutierrez is absolutely right in her claim that closet drama was not related to one particular sex, since adopted by many prominent male writers. However, her view does not clash with the fact that the genre was highly suitable for women writers. The privacy that the genre suggested, as a form of dramatic discourse, which is not exposed to the public ear, but read and realised in the domestic sphere, made it a more accessible form of drama for Renaissance women, who had to refrain from public speech, and therefore could not write drama for performance in any of the private theatres without the risk of damaging their reputation. As Margaret Ferguson puts it, "The act of writing, for oneself or for an audience of family and friends, would seem- like the dramatic form of the soliloquy- to occupy a shady territory between private and public verbal production" (1991 b, 49). By writing closet dramas, which were presumably designed for consumption within a private circle, women could create the illusion that they retained their sexual purity, hence that their voices were still legitimate to some extent, because their utterances did not cross the boundaries of the private sphere. They could thus opt for "a form of verbal power that appears to sidestep the problem of women's

23 See Kegl, 1999, 137.
24 For an account of this case see Gutierrez, 1991, 235.
speaking in public precisely because the play is not designed for performance" (Ballaster, 1996, 273). Women writers' motivation for taking up the genre can therefore be explained from a gendered perspective.  

At the same time that these closet dramas were presented as plays which were not designed for staging, it has often been suggested that within the setting of the noble household these closet dramas were nevertheless performed in small, private productions. As Gweno Williams, who has been concerned with staging late twentieth-century performances of early modern women's plays, maintains, the texts of closet dramas by Renaissance and early Restoration women dramatists contain "internal stage directions, detailed and precise references to contemporary theatrical practices...calls for integral stage action" (1998, 99). In Williams's view, this makes clear that the women playwrights clearly had performance of their texts in mind, although they supposedly only wrote their plays for private use. Williams's view seems plausible in the light of the important role that noblewomen played as performers and organisers of dramatic productions at court. However, we have no clear evidence that any of the closet dramas by Renaissance Englishwomen was ever staged. Thus, although these early plays by women may not have been "enclosed" in "tombs" of silence and privacy, a performance history of private productions of these dramas has as yet to be discovered.

25 Obviously, seeing these women dramatists' choice for closet drama as an appropriate way of masking their unfeminine utterances does not exclude the possibility of interpreting their selection of the genre in the light of coterie culture in which "literature as we generally define it was not a commercial activity" (Ezell 37).

26 In a paper recently presented at the colloquium "'The Woman's Part': Women and Drama in England and Spain, 1500-1700" (University of Groningen, the Netherlands; March 8th and 9th 2002) Marion Wynne-Davies suggested that women's closet dramas may indeed have a secret performance history. The possibilities for staging a play within the domestic setting of country houses, and banqueting houses in particular, were numerous. Women could enjoy the performances of dramatic entertainments unseen, by watching plays from barred windows. Wynne-Davies's interesting argument is supported by a description of queen Elizabeth I's visit to Elvetham in 1591: Elvetham, 1591. "On Thursday morning, her majestie as no sooner readie, and at her Gallerie windown looking into the Garden , but there began three Cornets to play certaine fantasike dances, at the measure whereof the Fayery Quene came into the garden, dauncing with her maides about her. Shee brought with her a garland, made in fourme of an imperiall crowne; within the sight of her Majestie shee fixed upon (sic) a silvered staffe, and sticking the staffe into the ground, spake as followeth. This spectacle and musike so delighted Her majesty, that shee commandaed to heare it sung and danced three times over, and called for divers Lords and Ladies to behold it" (quoted in Cole, 1999, 115-116). For a further discussion on the practical aspects of staging theatrical performances in seventeenth-century households, see Greg Walker, 1998, 53.