
ELIZABETH CARY

The Tragedy of Mariam, the Fair Queen of Jewry Cary supplied an Argument to the play, but the modern reader may be better served by a succinct summary of the historical situation and the play. Observing the unity of time, Cary brings the pressure of antecedent events and incorporates materials from other parts of the Herod story (drawn chiefly from Josephus's *Antiquities*) to heighten dramatic tension. Before the play begins, Herod the Great, with the aid of Rome, has (in 39 B.C.E.) supplanted Hircanus, the hereditary king and priest of Judea, divorced his first wife, Doris, and married Hircanus's granddaughter, the singularly beautiful Mariam, whom he loves with fierce intensity and jealous passion. To secure his throne he arranged a drowning to remove the new high priest, Mariam's brother Aristobolus (35 B.C.E.), and had old Hircanus executed (30 B.C.E.). Cary's play reverses these two events. Called to Rome to answer accusations leveled by Alexandra, the mother of Mariam and Aristobolus, Herod left orders with his uncle Josephus, who is also the husband of his sister Salome, to kill Mariam in the event of his death so no other man could possess her. Reinstated as king, Herod had Josephus killed for telling Mariam about the decree for her death, taking that as evidence supporting Salome's false charge that the two were lovers. He then married Salome to Constabarus, who, unknown to Herod, had hidden away the sons of Babas, under sentence of death for their opposition to Herod. The play begins with Herod again in Rome, in danger of death as a partisan of the defeated and recently deceased Mark Antony. Before departing, he had left with his officer Sohemus another order for Mariam to be killed in the event of his death; Sohemus also reveals the decree to her.

Act 1, Scene 1 starts as news comes of Herod's death, causing (during three acts) a sense of relief, liberation, and new beginnings under the joint rule of Mariam and her mother, Alexandra (in the minority of Mariam's son). Mariam is at first torn between grief and joy but is relieved that the tyrant who murdered her kin and decreed her death will not return. Pheroras, Herod's brother, who had been under command to marry an infant, now marries his true love, Graphina. The sons of Babas now come out of hiding to serve the state, and Constabarus is no longer in peril for having concealed them. Sohe-

mus will not suffer for his decision to let Mariam live in defiance of Herod's command. Even those who regret Herod's death benefit from it: his sister Salome, who had first plotted to have her second husband, Constabarus, killed by Herod so she might marry a new lover, now determines upon divorce instead—scandalous for a woman in Judea but hardly so wicked as murder.

At Herod's unexpected return, all these hopeful new beginnings are crushed: Babas's sons are executed; Sohemus is accused by Salome of adultery with Mariam and is executed for that (and for revealing Herod's instructions); Mariam refuses Herod's sexual advances and berates him for murdering her kin; Salome engineers a plot by which Mariam's servant offers (supposedly from her) a cup of poison to Herod and then goads Herod to command her death. A messenger recounts the details of Mariam's noble death, and Herod runs mad with grief and remorse, persuaded at last of her innocence and inestimable worth.

In this play Mariam is positioned against several foils. One is the chorus, which in this kind of Senecan tragedy speak from a partial, not an authoritative, vantage point: as a company of Jews, they judge Mariam by their own very conservative notion of a wife's duty, that she owes entire subjection of mind and body to her husband. Another is Salome, who speaks forcefully for a woman's right to divorce and for evenhanded justice for unhappy wives—though she herself is thoroughly wicked, denouncing the innocent Mariam for marital infidelity while she flaunts her illicit affairs and has two husbands killed when she is ready to replace them. Mariam herself recognizes that she has brought her death on herself by refusing to live by the accepted female triad of virtues: she is chaste but manifestly not silent or obedient. Other foils to Mariam are Graphina, Doris, Alexandra, and—by allusion—Cleopatra. Mariam challenges patriarchal control within the institution of marriage, claiming a wife's right to her own speech—public and private—as well as to the integrity of her own emotional life and self-definition.

The Tragedy of Mariam, The Fair Queen of Jewry

Written by that learned, virtuous, and truly noble lady, e.c.

THE NAMES OF THE SPEAKERS

HEROD, <i>King of Judea</i>	GRAPHINA, <i>his love</i>
DORIS, <i>his first wife</i>	BABAS' FIRST SON
MARIAM, <i>his second wife</i>	BABAS' SECOND SON
SALOME, <i>HEROD'S sister</i>	ANANELL, <i>the high priest</i>
ANTIPATER, <i>his son by DORIS</i>	SOHEMUS, <i>a counsellor to HEROD</i>
ALEXANDRA, <i>MARIAM'S mother</i>	NUNTIO
SILLEUS, <i>prince of Arabia</i>	SILLEUS' MAN
CONSTABARUS, <i>husband to</i>	BU[TLER], <i>another messenger</i>
SALOME	SOLDIER
PHERORAS, <i>HEROD'S brother</i>	CHORUS, <i>a company of Jews</i>

*Act 1*SCENE 1¹[MARIAM *alone.*]

MARIAM How oft have I with public voice run on
 To censure Rome's last hero² for deceit:
 Because he wept when Pompey's life was gone,
 Yet when he lived, he thought his name too great.
 5 But now I do recant, and, Roman lord,
 Excuse too rash a judgment in a woman:
 My sex pleads pardon, pardon then afford,
 Mistaking is with us but too too common.
 Now do I find, by self-experience taught,
 10 One object yields both grief and joy:
 You wept indeed, when on his worth you thought,
 But joyed that slaughter did your foe destroy.
 So at his death your eyes true drops did rain,
 Whom dead, you did not wish alive again.
 15 When Herod lived, that now is done to death,

1. The first edition, 1613, contains some obvious misprints here silently corrected.

2. Julius Caesar. At line 5 Mariam addresses the absent Caesar in apostrophe.

Oft have I wished that I from him were free:
 Oft have I wished that he might lose his breath,
 Oft have I wished his carcass dead to see.
 Then rage and scorn had put my love to flight,
 20 That love which once on him was firmly set:
 Hate hid his true affection from my sight,
 And kept my heart from paying him his debt.
 And blame me not, for Herod's jealousy
 Had power even constancy itself to change:
 25 For he, by barring me from liberty,
 To shun^o my ranging, taught me first to range. *prevent*
 But yet too chaste a scholar was my heart,
 To learn to love another than my lord:
 To leave his love, my lesson's former part,
 30 I quickly learned, the other I abhorred.
 But now his death to memory doth call
 The tender love that he to Mariam bare.^o *bore*
 And mine to him; this makes those rivers fall,
 Which by another thought unmoistened are.
 35 For Aristobulus, the lowliest youth³
 That ever did in angel's shape appear,
 The cruel Herod was not moved to ruth;^o *pity*
 Then why grieves Mariam Herod's death to hear?
 Why joy I not the tongue no more shall speak,
 40 That yielded forth my brother's latest^o doom: *final*
 Both youth and beauty might thy^o fury break, *Herod's*
 And both in him did ill befit a tomb.
 And, worthy grandsire,⁴ ill did he requite
 His high ascent, alone by thee procured,
 45 Except^o he murdered thee to free the sprite^o *unless/spirit*
 Which still he thought on earth too long immured.
 How happy was it that Sohemus' mind
 Was moved to pity my distressed estate!
 Might Herod's life a trusty servant find,⁵

3. Some editors emend to "loveliest," given the great emphasis on his beauty.

4. Mariam here addresses the murdered Hircanus.

5. I.e., if Herod alive had been able to find trustworthy servants to kill me, my death had been joined to his.

50 My death to his had been unseparate.
 These thoughts have power, his death to make me bear,
 Nay more, to wish the news may firmly hold:
 Yet cannot this repulse some falling tear,
 That will against my will some grief unfold.
 55 And more I owe him for his love to me,
 The deepest love that ever yet was seen:
 Yet had I rather much a milkmaid be,
 Than be the monarch of Judea's queen.
 It was for nought but love he wished his end
 60 Might to my death but the vaunt-courier^o prove: *forerunner*
 But I had rather still be foe than friend,
 To him that saves for hate, and kills for love.
 Hard-hearted Mariam, at thy discontent
 What floods of tears have drenched his manly face!
 65 How canst thou then so faintly now lament
 They truest lover's death, a death's disgrace:⁶
 Ay, now, mine eyes, you do begin to right
 The wrongs of your admirer and my lord.⁷
 Long since you should have put your smiles to flight,
 70 Ill doth a widowed eye with joy accord.
 Why, now methinks the love I bare^o him then, *bore*
 When virgin freedom left me unrestrained,
 Doth to my heart begin to creep again,
 My passion⁸ now is far from being feigned.
 75 But, tears, fly back, and hide you in your banks,⁹
 You must not be to Alexandra seen:
 For if my moan be spied, but little thanks
 Shall Mariam have, from that incensèd queen.

SCENE 2

[MARIAM. ALEXANDRA.]

ALEXANDRA What means these tears? My Mariam doth mistake,

6. I.e., her faint laments dishonor his death.

7. Herod.

8. Emotion of grief.

9. Your eyes.

80 The news we heard did tell the tyrant's end:
 What° weep'st thou for thy brother's murd'rer's sake? *why*
 Will ever wight° a tear for Herod spend? *person*
 My curse pursue his breathless trunk and spirit,
 Base Edomite, the damnèd Esau's heir:¹
 85 Must he ere Jacob's child the crown inherit?
 Must he, vile wretch, be set in David's chair?° *throne*
 No, David's soul, within the bosom placed
 Of our forefather Abram,² was ashamed:
 To see his seat with such a toad disgraced,
 90 That seat that hath by Judah's race been famed.
 Thou fatal enemy to royal blood,³
 Did not the murder of my boy suffice,
 To stop thy cruel mouth that gaping stood,
 But must thou dim the mild Hircanus' eyes?
 95 My gracious father, whose too ready hand
 Did lift this Idumean from the dust:
 And he, ungrateful caitiff,° did withstand° *wretch / oppose*
 The man that did in him most friendly trust.
 What kingdom's right could cruel Herod claim,
 100 Was he not Esau's issue, heir of hell?
 Then what succession can he have but shame?
 Did not his ancestor his birth-right sell?
 Oh yes, he doth from Edom's name derive⁴
 His cruel nature which with blood is fed:
 105 That made him me of sire and son deprive,
 He ever thirsts for blood, and blood is red.
 Weep'st thou because his love to thee was bent,
 And read'st thou love in crimson characters?
 Slew he thy friends to work thy heart's content?
 110 No: hate may justly call that action hers.

1. The Edomites were descendants of Esau, who sold his birthright (as firstborn) to his younger brother Jacob for a mess of pottage (Genesis 25. 29–34); Jacob also tricked his father into giving him the blessing intended for Esau. The Israelites were descendants of Jacob; the story was interpreted to signify God's favor to them over Esau's descendants.

2. Abraham. David, one of Israel's first kings (now dead and so said to be in Abraham's bosom), is ashamed to see that throne occupied by Herod.

3. Herod, because he had Alexandra's father, Hircanus, and her son Aristobolus killed.

4. *Edom* was thought to derive from a root meaning "red."

He gave the sacred priesthood for thy sake
 To Aristobulus, yet doomed^o him dead: *commanded*
 Before his back the ephod warm could make,
 And ere the miter settled on his head:⁵
 115 Oh, had he given my boy no less than right,
 The double oil should to his forehead bring
 A double honor, shining doubly bright;
 His birth anointed him both priest and king.
 And say my father and my son he slew
 120 To royalize by right your prince-born breath:⁶
 Was love the cause, can Mariam deem it true,
 That Mariam gave commandment for her death?⁷
 I know by fits he showed some signs of love,
 And yet not love, but raging lunacy:
 125 And this his hate to thee may justly prove,
 That sure he hates Hircanus' family.
 Who knows if he, unconstant wavering lord,
 His love to Doris⁸ had renewed again?
 And that he might his bed to her afford,
 130 Perchance he wished that Mariam might be slain.
 MARIAM Doris! Alas, her time of love was past,
 Those coals were raked in embers long ago
 In Mariam's love and she was now disgraced⁹
 Nor did I glory in her overthrow.
 135 He not a whit his first-born son esteemed,
 Because as well as his he was not mine:¹
 My children only for his own he deemed,
 These boys that did descend from royal line
 These did he style his heirs to David's throne;

5. Priestly vestments: the ephod is a linen garment; the headpiece is termed a "miter," conflating it with a bishop's miter.

6. To make Mariam (or her son) the rightful ruler.

7. I.e., If you think he killed to give you royal power, what about the commands for your death? Did Mariam command her own death?

8. Herod's first wife.

9. The 1613 text reads "Of," not "In." With the emendation the line indicates that the "coals" of Herod's love for Doris had become embers in the fire of his love for Mariam, so that she (Doris) was now out of favor, "disgraced."

1. Herod cared nothing for his firstborn son by Doris (Antipater), since he was not Mariam's son.

140 My Alexander, if he live, shall sit
 In the majestic seat of Solomon;²
 To will it so, did Herod think it fit.

ALEXANDRA Why, who can claim from Alexander's brood
 That gold-adornèd lion-guarded chair?
 145 Was Alexander not of David's blood?
 And was not Mariam Alexander's heir?
 What more than right could Herod then bestow,³
 And who will think except for more than right⁴
 He did not raise them, for they were not low,
 150 But born to wear the crown in his despite:
 Then send those tears away that are not sent
 To thee by reason, but by passion's power:
 Thine eyes to cheer, thy cheeks to smiles be bent,
 And entertain with joy this happy hour.

155 Felicity, if when she comes, she finds
 A mourning habit, and a cheerless look,
 Will think she is not welcome to thy mind,
 And so perchance her lodging will not brook.^o *accept*
 Oh, keep her whilst thou hast her; if she go,
 160 She will not easily return again:
 Full many a year have I endured in woe,
 Yet still have sued her presence to obtain:
 And did not I to her as presents send
 A table,^o that best art did beautify, *picture*
 165 Of two, to whom Heaven did best feature lend,
 To woo her love by winning Anthony?
 For when a prince's favor we do crave,
 We first their minions' loves do seek to win:
 So I, that sought Felicity to have,
 170 Did with her minion Anthony begin.⁵

2. David's son, whose kingship was even more glorious.

3. This Alexander was Mariam's father and Alexandra's husband; as he was of David's blood, and Mariam was his heir, the throne was hers by right, not by Herod's gift.

4. I.e., Herod had his own designs in elevating Mariam and her brother, so they will seem to owe their places to him, not to their own right.

5. In this little allegory, Alexandra, seeking Felicity, began by wooing her minion Anthony, by sending pictures of Mariam and Aristobolus, but he could not decide between them.

With double sleight I sought to captivate
 The warlike lover, but I did not right:
 For if my gift had borne but half the rate,^o *value*
 The Roman had been overtaken quite.
 175 But now he farèd like a hungry guest,
 That to some plenteous festival is gone;
 Now this, now that, he deems to eat were best,
 Such choice doth make him let them all alone.
 The boy's⁶ large forehead first did fairest seem,
 180 Then glanced his eye upon my Mariam's cheek:
 And that without comparison did deem,
 What was in either but he most did like.
 And, thus distracted,^o either's beauty's might *torn, confused*
 Within the other's excellence was drowned:
 185 Too much delight did bare^o him from delight, *strip, deprive*
 For either's love the other's did confound.
 Where if thy portraiture had only gone,⁷
 His life from Herod, Anthony had taken:
 He would have lovèd thee, and thee alone,
 190 And left the brown Egyptian clean forsaken,
 And Cleopatra then to seek had been⁸
 So firm a lover of her wanèd face:
 Then great Anthonius' fall we had not seen,
 By her that fled to have him hold the chase.⁹
 195 Then Mariam in a Roman's chariot set,
 In place of Cleopatra might have shown:
 A mart^o of beauties in her visage met, *display*
 And part in this, that they were all her own.^o *not artificial*
 MARIAM Not to be empress of aspiring Rome,
 200 Would Mariam like to Cleopatra live:
 With purest body will I press my tomb,
 And wish no favors Anthony could give.
 ALEXANDRA Let us retire us, that we may resolve

6. Aristobolus.

7. I.e., if she had sent only Mariam's picture, Anthony would have loved her and left Cleopatra, "the brown Egyptian."

8. Cleopatra would then have lacked (had to seek for) love.

9. Cleopatra, who abandoned Anthony at the battle of Actium.

How now to deal in this reversèd state:
 205 Great are th'affairs that we must now revolve,
 And great affairs must not be taken late.

SCENE 3

[MARIAM. ALEXANDRA. SALOME.]

SALOME More plotting yet? Why, now you have the thing
 For which so oft you spent your suppliant breath:
 And Mariam hopes to have another king.
 210 Her eyes do sparkle joy for Herod's death.

ALEXANDRA If she desired another king to have,
 She might before she came in Herod's bed
 Have had her wish. More kings than one did crave
 For leave to set a crown upon her head.

215 I think with more than reason^o she laments,
 That she is freed from such a sad annoy:
 Who is't will weep to part from discontent?
 And if she joy, she did not causeless^o joy.

unreasonably

without cause

SALOME You durst not thus have given your tongue the rein,
 220 If noble Herod still remained in life:
 Your daughter's betters far, I dare maintain,
 Might have rejoiced to be my brother's wife.

MARIAM My betters far! Base woman, 'tis untrue,
 You scarce have ever my superiors seen:
 225 For Mariam's servants were as good as you,
 Before she came to be Judea's queen.

SALOME Now stirs the tongue that is so quickly moved,
 But more than once your choler^o have I borne:
 Your fumish^o words are sooner said than proved,
 230 And Salome's reply is only scorn.

anger

irascible

MARIAM Scorn those that are for thy companions held.
 Though I thy brother's face had never seen,
 My birth thy baser birth so far excelled,
 I had to both of you the princess been.
 235 Thou parti-Jew, and parti-Edomite,
 Thou mongrel: issued from rejected race,