She "That seekes to be by publike language grac't":

Salome: The Ultimate Machiavelle

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Introduction: Where does Feminine Voice and Agency begin in Dramatic Literature?

Margaret King, in “Women’s Voices, the Early Modern and the Civilization of the West,” states that the search for a feminine voice through literature “can be focused through the time period of 1350 to 1750” (22). However, she posits that “women’s claims to participation in culture” should not be studied as just a “transitional stage in the movement from medieval to modern Europe” (22), but as evidence of publication from the latter sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. One such publication is Elizabeth Cary’s *Tragedy of Mariam*, a controversial text because it specifically targets a widening, educated female readership, familiar with already established dramatic and societal conventions. In her drama, Cary uses Salome, a female character, who is well known to readers as deviant. Historically, Salome’s sordid tale has been misinterpreted as being part of the *Bible* itself by Christian readers, but it is only textually present in the works of Josephus Flavius, a first century Romano-Jewish historian and hagiographer who wrote *The Antiquities of the Jews*. Through Flavius, Salome entered the realm of Christian legend—not only by famously seducing King Herod with her sexy and provocative dance of the seven veils, but also by having the sainted John the Baptist beheaded as her one request. Cary’s adaptation of this work further highlights her as a villainous character as it builds on what Christian readers perceived as evil. She is an independent female character who succeeds in achieving her goals, even though they openly negate societal conventions, and thereby establishes a female voice.

As an enigmatic character, critics have taken several approaches to studying Salome, such as discussing her as an embodiment of what was considered a “bad
woman” through her subversion of social feminine norms. For example, in “Gender and the Political Subject in the Tragedy of Mariam,” Karen Raber says that Salome “portrays issues of gender, will and self-determination in terms of status, wealth, and cynical manipulation of discourses of law and religion” (335), and equalizes Salome with her male counterparts in terms of societal importance. Her determination for success, in conjunction with her open denial of law and social structure, are truly masculine traits, thus placing her at odds with her female counterparts and making the male population nervous.

Raber also believes that because Salome is openly manipulative in voicing her opinions, she “discredits any comfortable reliance on ‘natural’ sexual difference to warrant gender inequity” (335-336), meaning that because she is acting like a man, she is free from “gendered legal constraints” (336) and equalizes the sexes in her behavior. Salome defies the patriarchal order both “domestically and politically.” She is, in actuality, “refusing to allow any code to define and contain her” (336). Salome becomes monstrous and unnatural for the dominant society because her success within a male-dominated sphere, governed by an absolute ruler “exploits the artificiality of one by mimicking the worst excesses of the other” (336), meaning politically that male dominance expanded on what was considered female inadequacies in order to subjugate women. Through her open actions, she projects how the feminine domestic realm, in its concerns with marital affairs and household hierarchy, extends into and affects the male dominated societal structure. Salome equalizes gender by invoking both male and female, subverting governmental structure, and projecting the domestic realm into the social world. This is an extension of what was then prevalent in drama as the Machiavel—a
character who uses manipulation for personal gain. In order to further this argument that Salome’s character represents what all women faced, I will look specifically at how Cary uses a female Machiavelle, to add a feminine voice to dramatic literary dialogue, and, especially how that affected the broadening female readership.

While Salome is interpreted as malevolent, this view is complicated by the fact that Cary’s version of Salome possesses many positive female traits as well. For the newly educated female readership, she projects the inner feelings of women who were denied the ability to voice their opinions and be viable participants in cultural and literary dialogue. Yvonne Merrill recognizes the feminist potential of Salome when she contends that, through its female characters, Cary’s text reveals a “conflicted personality covertly resisting the silencing of women” (2). However, she claims that because of that silencing, Cary was “unable to make a consistent or effective response to the authorities who silence her” (1). In contrast to Merrill’s notion that Salome, and the namesake of the play, Mariam, are dual halves of one conflicted feminine persona, I believe that Cary’s bold use of an outlaw character reveals Salome as a projection of the possibilities for women who could successfully achieve personal goals through direct negation and subversion of the "good woman" that Mariam or other women represent. Unlike Mariam, a victim of a dominant patriarchal class structure, Salome becomes hero-like because she actually escapes this misogyny. I believe that Cary is not representing her own seventeenth century existence through Salome, but rather is using her to represent all women who are held accountable to societal constrictions.

For Cary, Salome’s character intersects with the popular topic of the “female question,” meaning women’s placement within the confines of silence and obedience, as
required for "virtuous" seventeenth century women. Cary introduces the popular figure of the Machiavel to show through Salome that female readers could become agents of change. If women embraced their gender and navigated the society that kept them ignorant and silent, they could subvert societal norms and gain control over their own identity. Janet Clare also agrees with Merrill and King that there is a noted presence of women's publications, and she extends it further that "women writers represented in their work an alternative culture, which ran alongside the dominant culture," and in doing so they were "transgressing boundaries" (Clare). Because Cary uses the dramatic character of the Machiavel, which was familiar to male and especially female readers, she transposed public knowledge into a private forum and extends a feminist agenda.
Chapter 1: The Woman Debate: Conversations on Character

Just by using Salome as a prominent character, Cary builds on preconceived societal expectations and places an already noted deviant female character in diametric opposition to the virtuous "good woman," Mariam, who was always expected to be obedient and silent. There are many theories as to why women were kept silent, but perhaps the most prevalent comes from Merrill who states that if "women could not speak of men's affairs, they could not contest them" (2). This makes their imposed silence equal to accepted ignorance. Because women were not allowed viable roles in society, such as land entitlement, employment outside the home or publishing, Merrill establishes that they were denied the necessary social interaction to form personal identities, which denied them their own individuality. Identity, as it is defined for the seventeenth century woman, was culturally determined. The emphasis on female propriety came from Christian notions of the fall of Eve in conjunction with misunderstandings of the workings of the female body. The idea that a woman always knows who the mother of her baby is, but a father can never be positive of his progeny, caused men to distrust women both mentally and physically. This constructed untrustworthiness forced males to exert extreme force and protection over their female chattel in order to ensure patriarchal lineage. Not only did men enforce ideals of dominance on women, but women also accepted those same ideals, viewing them as class distinction, discounting their own intelligence and denying themselves individuality or even independence from their male counterparts.

An example of this distrust is The Araignment of Lewd, Idle, Froward, and Unconstant Women, published in 1615 by Joseph Swetnam. He cautions the man whose
wife is “fair” that he needs to be wary of other men and that “everyone will wish his death to enjoy her” (198). To Swetnam, a woman’s “beauty is always matched with merciless cruelty” (195), which blatantly implies a distrust of women based solely on their looks. If a woman is beautiful, then her husband or others should believe that she is unwholesome and untrustworthy. This actually distorts the well-known societal notion that a woman’s outward appearance projected her inner being. Swetnam’s treatise warns society that instead of beauty representing goodness, it is just the opposite. Therefore, men should distrust beauty and seek wealth through their chosen women instead. He warns that if a husband marries for beauty, then he “will soon tire of her, while riches maintain their attractiveness” (213). After marriage, the woman remains untrustworthy, which is why she “must stay away from women of ill repute,” because she should behave “in so sober and chaste a manner as never to encourage other men” (213). Hence, as long as a husband controls his wife’s movements, he is safe from her infidelities.

Swetnam’s attack on women definitely does not go unanswered. “Ester Hath Hang’d Haman: or an Answer to a Lewd Pamphlet, Entitled, The Arraignment of Women. With the Arraignment of Lewd, Idle, Froward, and Vnconstant Men, and Husbands” (1617), Ester Sowernam answers Swetnam on behalf of all women: she defines herself as “neither Maid, Wife, nor Widow, yet really all, and therefore experienced to defend all” (233). In her vehement response, Sowernam places Swetnam on trial, before her two chosen Judgesses: “Reason and Experiences.” She states that even though the Judgess Reason “may be blinded by passion,” she is more importantly “joined by Experience,” who is “known to be absolute and without compare” as well as “admirable excellent in her courses” (233). Throughout her mock trial, Sowernam addresses each fault Swetnam
gives to women and advises him, as representative of all males, to “recollect your wits; write out of deliberation, not out of fury; write out of advice, not out of idleness; forbear to charge women with faults which come from the contagion of Masculine serpents” (243). Sowernam directly alludes to Christianity’s belief in Eve’s fall and identifies the serpent’s masculinity, suggesting that it is a man’s “sex” that brings the downfall to mankind. She explains that this serpent becomes a contagion because the idea that women are untrustworthy infects all of society. The subjugation of women to a male dominant society is a disease which will eventually bring about the downfall of everyone if it does not change.

Such open commentary concerning “the woman’s position was due to a huge rise in printing” and enabled a “wider dissemination of these [texts] to the middle class populace of London, who were increasingly eager for such reading matter” (Henderson and McManus 11). These publications provided “a formal framework for the debate about women and a reservoir of examples and arguments upon which writers of ballads and other types of poetry, popular drama, conduct books and sermons could draw,” extending a reader/writer’s working knowledge into more public realms (Henderson and McManus 11). Unfortunately, because the pamphlets were not published by the more prominent stationers, they were not viewed as “literary,” nor were they durable enough to withstand the large amounts of handling because of their lurid content. Therefore, many, especially those written by women, did not survive, but their influence is still recognizable through other published mediums such as dramas like The Tragedy of Mariam. Cary, along with other writers, would have been familiar with these works and
could have either read or contributed to them, thus entering the dialogue between the sexes.

While men constrained women's education and their ability to publish, female education began to widen greatly in the seventeenth century. In fact, because women would have read these texts and responded, it can be noted that educated women had a "political, family, and religious community" (Hannay 79) in which to operate, much like Sowernam who probably wrote under a different name. Prior to this time, "access to literary community was denied to English women" and was "largely confined to religious matters" (Hannay 79), which helped to define women according to patriarchal religious education. This also reinforces Cary's choice of retelling a religious story and placing it in conjunction with the popularity of the debate about women. By using a well-known genre, recognizable to an educated readership in order to retell her story, Cary is able to give them a voice through Salome, specifically a female voice that does not adhere to masculine imposed constraints and expresses a personal agenda.

As a projection of the status of women for the seventeenth century, Cary uses Salome to embody the goals and dreams for women who wanted to become viable entities of their own society. Her voice becomes universal for all women and establishes what can be achievable. By subverting male notions of marriage and propriety, the play shows that women could succeed in discovering their undivided identities. Salome's character opposes the patriarchal misogyny women were forced to endure because she denies decidedly feminine roles, all while assuming the masculine trait of openly expressing her opinions. This open denial of prescriptive feminine roles projected other possibilities for women.
Chapter 2: The Machiavelle:

As a genre, closet dramas were not staged or performed, but allowed female writers in particular, the ability to make comments about society in general. These plays were produced within the privacy of country estates and for the benefit of a close group of friends with similar education and tastes. In line with other, contemporary writers, Cary infused political commentary into her works, which reached female audiences. Unlike the public dramatic sphere, where women were restricted, this seclusion allowed women to delve into popular social topics. These works flourished among female readers, who were previously denied the freedom of speech, and allowed them to gain some identity through what they were reading and understanding. For the seventeenth century, there were “relatively limited means of mass communication” (“Elizabeth Cary” 471) for readers in general, yet, through closet drama, women could enjoy a previously denied readership.

Along with the conventions of closet drama as well as public theater, Cary also relied on a newly popular character called the Machiavel, introduced in Niccolo Machiavelli’s work, *The Prince*. In his work, he states that that every person, should aspire to be outwardly virtuous while hiding his or her personal agenda. He posits that man is “often forced to do evil,” given his belief that the traits of good and bad are relative. Even though man should despise his bad side, he warns that he may “have need of [it] to maintain” himself (59). Female audiences likely embraced this idea because it suggested an equality of sorts. Women had already been adapting to the constraints imposed by their male counterparts. In order to remain active in a male dominated world, they had to remain outwardly virtuous as they subverted gender norms for personal gain.
Machiavelli posits that in order for one to achieve personal gain, one must manipulate others, creating another symbiotic relationship between deceiver and deceived. Machiavelli proposes that if a person seeks to deceive, he/she “will always find someone who will allow himself to be deceived” (53), projecting a relationship between deceiver and deceived. This reinforces that not only could a person perform good and evil actions, they could retain both traits within themselves as they performed those same actions. In other words, both good and evil could exist within one person, just like good and evil people exist in society. Females realized that this was already a prominent feature within their world; therefore, it would have been a readily acceptable ideal.

The public and private use of the Machiavellian character in seventeenth-century drama projected very different ideals. Through public forum, it quickly became farcical, dependent on the actor’s projection. In the private sphere, it could be equated with the female perspective, especially since virtuous women were not allowed to be a part of public theater. Elizabeth Cary is not the only playwright who uses the Machiavel in order to project the importance of the ability to manipulate other characters. The female Machiavelle in plays written by men also reflects the patriarchy’s concern that women would use Machiavelli’s philosophy to subvert traditional gender norms, giving them some equality in the dramatic realm. Male playwrights, just like female ones, used malevolent characters to highlight Machiavelli’s theories of man/woman and his/her place within society as well as his/her relationship on the inside. William Shakespeare provides a famous case in the figure of Lady Macbeth, the only other female Machiavelle from this time period. Lady MacBeth uses the philosophy of self-preservation through the manipulation of political and social structure to seek her own personal agenda.
Lady Macbeth’s character portrays both the misogynistic use of the Machiavel to illustrate female untrustworthiness and the feminist potential of the stock vice character that I will argue Cary later capitalizes on. As Jeanne Roberts notes, the definition of the Machiavel is when the villain of the play becomes the protagonist but is then defeated in the end (49). Lady Macbeth from The Tragedy of Macbeth exemplifies that dramatic convention by manipulating other characters into doing her bidding, yet she denies what makes her feminine and ultimately brings about her own as well as the downfall of others.

Shakespeare uses Lady Macbeth as a Machiavell to suggest that a woman’s desire for power comes at the expense of her own femininity. In many ways, she represents all seventeenth-century women, who were forced to succumb to societal constructs, placing women at the mercy of their male counterparts, as well as the society that defined them. Interestingly, her voice only comes through private soliloquys or in conversations with her husband, like other publicly performing, notably male, Machiavels. Through these private intimations, it becomes obvious to the reader that she is jealous of man’s freedom and decides to invoke the supernatural world to de-sex herself and to gain a more masculine freedom of speech: “Come you spirits/That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here” (I.v.ii.40-41). She asks an outside, unnatural force to fill her with what would be considered masculine feeling and to “fill me from the crown to the tow topful/ of direst cruelty! Make thick my blood” (I.v.ii.42-43). The force she seeks would be considered a non-Christian entity because it is based in her need to unsex herself in order to achieve personal gain. It is obvious she does not wish to be feminine
with its presented gender limitations and begs for some spirit to stop her natural courses, thus taking away anything that would limit her to womanhood:

Stop up th' access and passage to remorse,

That no compunctious visitings of nature

Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between

Th' effect and [it]! Come to my woman's breasts,

And take my milk for gall, you murth'ring ministers

Wherever in your sightless substances

You wait on nature's mischief! Come, thick night,

And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,

That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,

Nor heaven peep through the dark

To cry, "Hold, hold! (I.v.11.42-54)

With this invocation, she replaces all feminine flow of feeling, as well as physical attributes, with what were considered masculine emotions of vengeance and cruelty. As a representative of all women whose success hinged on their male guardians and husbands, she wants to gain her own personal power and agency. As her sexuality becomes ambiguous, so does her true intentions and eventually her gender identity, leaving her insane. With her death, Shakespeare emphasizes the popular notion that if a man, or woman operates outside of the natural societal structure, then he, or she cannot remain within its norms.
With Lady Macbeth’s demise, Shakespeare reveals the effects of a society where unsexed women deprive men of their power. He adopts the popular idea that women should stay women and men should stay men, as society expected. As Lady Macbeth becomes an unsexed character who embraces her own manipulations, he impresses on his audience that she becomes monstrous while her husband becomes infantile. She tells him that his behavior is child-like when she alludes to her past support by saying that she has "given suck, [to him] and know/How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me:"
(I.vii.ll.67-68). She warns further that even “while it was smiling in my face / [I] Have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums/And dash'd the brains out, had I so sworn as you/Have done to this” (I.vii. ll.69-72). In other words, she treats him like an errant child, to whom she has not only given life, but has also sustained. She then states openly that he is a child who she could just as easily destroy, placing her in alignment with what readers/audiences would recognize as the ultimate example of a “bad woman.” She assumes total masculinity when she tells Macbeth to “screw your courage to the sticking place” (I.vii.ll.61) when he is overcome with fear before killing Lord Duncan. With this, she no longer endears herself to the audience as a Machiavelle, but demonizes women who de-sex themselves in order to gain personal success.

Ultimately, her evolution emphasizes to the audience that she brings about her own downfall and death through her gender ambivalence, not through the manipulations of other characters. This enforces the idea that female Machiavellies become monsters. In other words, she is her own worst enemy. Lady Macbeth cannot remain feminine because she’s negates her own feelings, and she cannot remain masculine because society will not allow a woman in power. Lady Macbeth exemplifies qualities of the vice character in her
manipulations of her husband, and yet becomes more Machiavellian by gaining power for her husband through the manipulations of others. Her establishment as strictly Machiavelle cannot occur because the audience never knows whether to interpret her agenda as personal or not. In the end, like all villains in Senecan tragedy, she dies. The openness of Salome's activities solidifies her as a woman who does not adhere to patriarchal constraint, is willing to openly seek her own identity and, most importantly succeeds in achieving her own personal goals. Her actions project a new female idea that perhaps Machiavelli was correct that a person could be both good and evil, yet they must embrace both traits. Her success creates a new female part of a literary dialogue establishing a voice previously silenced by social constraints.

In conjunction with Karen Raber, Tiffany Rašovic agrees that female Machiavellian characters, such as Shakespeare’s Lady Macbeth or Cary’s Salome, cannot remain as part of the dominant structure; however, she explains that personal success comes not from a projection from the author himself, or herself, but more from her open deviation from femininity. Other women, such as Mariam, according to Rašovic “seek integrity of inner/private and outer/public behavior” as women from this time period like Lady Macbeth would have done. I disagree when she suggests that Salome “uses a tactic of conscious personal ‘dismemberment’ to survive and maintain agency” (Rašovic). I find that to be truer for Lady Macbeth. While it seems that both Rašovic and Raber agree that Salome defies seventeenth century conventions, Raber believes Salome cannot remain in the patriarchal order, because she is Elizabeth Cary’s personal projection, whereas Rašovic posits that she consciously chooses to change her femininity in order to remain part of the male hierarchy. Both acknowledge Cary’s proposed intent for Salome,
but to differing ends. If, as Rašovic posits, Salome changes herself in order to remain part of the social structure, then how is she not, like Lady Macbeth, driven mad and destroyed in this tragedy? Also, instead of looking at Salome’s character as representing something new, Raber contrasts her with other established characters, which I believe are incomparable. Because Salome is not only successful in her personal agenda, but also is never silenced, Cary’s use of this openly deviant Machiavellian character models how women could gain success through various subversions of societal standards.

By using what Christians would have recognized as an openly malevolent character, Salome, Cary projects what would happen if a motivated woman embraced her identity and openly manipulated others for personal gain. It can be noted that women have always recognized how to navigate a misogynistic society that denied women identity, especially by influencing their male counterparts. For the educated female reader, Salome projects and embodies what women were already experiencing, giving them an alternate projection of a differing outcome. If a woman embraces her femininity and openly educates and pushes forth her own agenda, it can be possible for her to achieve success.

Salome, like Lady Macbeth, fulfills Shakespeare’s ideas concerning the female Machiavellie. She reflects the two basic cultural fears about women concerning appearance and actions. Through her commentary she believes that she is not what was considered outwardly beautiful, nor is she silent as was expected of all women. Salome’s success is vocally detailed throughout her story, beginning with her own assessment of her beauty as she contends, “Tis long ago since shame was written on my tainted brow” (I.II. 282-283). This communicates that because of her past, she has not been what would
have been considered a good wife and is progressive in thinking that she cannot change previous assertions, nor does she have the desire to change her behavior. True to the idea of the Machiavelle, even Salome’s appearance screams out to the reader that she is unacceptable. From her “tainted brow,” to her “baseness,” she is described as being bad, both inside and out, suggesting her character. This agrees with Joseph Swetnam, who printed that women were “colorful dessemblers” (195) in that their “beauty is always matched with merciless cruelty” (195). While we never know for sure whether Salome’s physical appearance establishes her as beautiful, her internal motivations project her as malicious. Because Cary builds on Salome's deviant notoriety, she implies that even though her character is openly deviant, her motivations are not outside of what a woman would have desired for herself. She has no intent of adhering to the society that denies female individuality, but reveals what women can achieve when they ignore, to some extent, gender norms.

As this example suggests, Salome also defies popular culture because she embraces the power of her sexuality, which she asserts is the only way for a woman to be truly rich. She says that by offering it she will “purge my sin” and finishes by saying that the law which governs a woman is “made for none but who are poor” (I. 11.311-312) in thoughts, deeds and self-worth, implying that money has nothing to do with it, but that a woman's value as a person is her true richness. This aligns with the true Machiavellian perspective that if a person, in this case, a woman, values herself through her sexuality and recognizes her own individuality, separate from societal constraints, then she is truly equal to others, especially her male counterparts. By gaining her own personal advantage through self-reliance, Salome, therefore presents an entirely new, and yet recognizable
voice for female readers. Through Salome’s subversion and manipulation of patriarchal constraints, Cary establishes that perceived virtues are trivial and should hold no power over the feminine identity.

As the dominant voice for seventeenth century patriarchal society, Salome’s second husband Constabarus represents the prominent thought of the time period. He gives readers the societal perception of Salome by warning her about “how much a virtuous woman is esteemed” (I.II.392) and encouraging her to “Seek to be both chaste and chastely deemed” (I.II.394). Constabarus emphasizes that it is important for a woman to appear chaste, once again establishing the prominent ideal that a woman’s outer appearance exudes her internal motivations. This aligns with Machiavelli’s belief that a prince should at least appear noble to his subjects. Constabarus brings his point full circle to Salome that in relation to her husband, a woman should always be chaste and obedient. Salome’s violent response to Constabarus comes in the form of questioning him about her earlier protection of him. She feels he has been thankless because he wishes she would change her actions:

Did I for this uprear thy low estate!

Did I for this requital beg thy life,

That thou hadst forfeited. Hapless fate.

To be to such a thankless wretch the wife! (I.II. 397-400).

Salome rails against her husband that he does not appreciate the things she has actually done as she acknowledges that “This hand of mind hath lifted up thy head, / Which many a day ago had fallen low” (I.II.401-402), reminding him that she was there to protect him from Herod’s wrath “Because the sons of Baba are not dead.” She reinforces to her
husband that "To me thou dost both life and fortune owe" (I. ll. 403-404). This commentary actually applies to all women, reinforcing a wife’s plight in marriage because a woman is constantly at her husband’s mercy, and it is only through her husband that she is acknowledged for her good deeds.

Salome openly negates patriarchal dominance and seeks to gain her own freedom, but unlike Lady Macbeth, it is not through her husbands. First Josephus, and then Constabarus, is killed because she betrays them to her brother, King Herod, who then destroys them, making the reader question her loyalties. Salome’s jealousy of Mariam propels her to seek her own success. Her independence and superiority to these men is due to her voice which has also helped her obtain her present stature: “Impudence on my forehead sits/ she bids me work my will without delay, and for my will, I will employ my wits” (I. ll.294-296). With this, she presents that her “Impudence” becomes the equalizer between men and women. Salome continually emphasizes that intelligence and education will help women become equal to their male counterparts. Emotions for her do not dictate the “male or female” gender, but equalizes them. She rationalizes that, if her husband “loves, I love; what then can be the cause keeps me for being the Arabian’s wife?” (I. ll. 297-298). She notes her previous jealousy over the relationship between her husbands and their charge, Mariam. If her husband, or any other male for that matter, is allowed to seek his desires elsewhere, meaning possibly Mariam, then why shouldn’t a female? A woman should not be accountable to a man for her value, neither through her appearance nor her actions. Salome’s proposition is definitely outside of what would have been accepted as normal, seventeenth-century female behavior.
Influenced by the popular idea of the “Great Chain of Being,” the male characters of the play, in particular, Constabarus, reflect society’s concerns over such empowered women. These women, they feel, will turn the cosmic order all “topsy-turvy,” where all forms of animals would veer from their natural instincts. For example, in response to Salome’s prediction, that she will forge the way for other women to take on the same masculine features, she asserts that “Though I be the first that to this course do bend, I shall not be the last, full well I know” (I.11.435-436). In outrage, he exclaims “Are Hebrew women now transformed to men? / Why do you not as well our battles fight and wear our Armour?” (I.11.421-422). He implies that any woman who takes on the same responsibilities as a man, would become a monster and destroy the world. If a woman challenged cultural norms by adopting what were considered masculine traits, then the seasons would become opposite and the entire society as they knew it would perish. He reinforces generally accepted behavior for women as he reiterates how a woman should be a reflection of her man. This historical basis establishes why women should never be or act like men and vice versa. In making these assertions, Constabarus represents the voice of society when he believes strict gender difference is the only way for social order to remain stable. Salome’s plot silences the dominant voice of society as she invites other women to ignore it and become their own agents of change. She manipulates societal assumptions about women to her own advantage and in doing so she reveals their falsity. Her navigation of a misogynistic society allows her to model what is achievable for women who choose to seek agency.

Salome is ultimately identifiable as Machiavellian as she manipulates another character, Pheroras, by playing on his assumptions concerning women. She first tries to
question Pheroras' motives of going against Herod's wishes and marrying Graphina. He pleads with Salome to "Urge me no more Graphina to forsake" (III.11.1) because he believes his love overrules Herod's edict. Salome implies that perhaps this marriage is dishonorable since it goes against Herod's wishes, even though he is believed to be dead. She claims that Graphina is "a woman full of natural defects" (III.11.13) and wonders "what your eye in her could find" (III.11.14), allowing Pheroras to admit that in his wife he found "loveliness" and in his ear found her "wit." He fully states that it is her wit for which he married her. Salome further manipulates male assumptions as she comments that "Wit may show the way to ill, as good you know" (III.11.24-25), reinforcing that wit teaches women how to manipulate. Salome impresses to Pheroras that it is neither 'wit' nor intelligence that attracts him to Graphina. This alludes to Salome's ability to manipulate men to achieve success through her own intelligence. Throughout her drama, she has continually praised her own wit, giving the idea that she feels that Pheroras, like most men, is not very intelligent and easily manipulated. By revealing his true reasons for marrying, as in Graphina's beauty, which he aligns with her 'wit', Salome reinforces ideas that the dominant male ideology pronounces women as dangerous if they are intelligent, and declares as well that they are sexually untrustworthy.

Salome's intelligence enhances her Machiavellian traits as she manipulates Pheroras into telling the King that Constabarus has gone against him by harboring Babus' sons, and convinces him that in doing so perhaps Herod would not be as angry with his marriage. Cary uses Salome's maneuvers to reveal that women are as adept at political manipulation as their male counterparts. By taking Pheroras into her confidence, undertaking "to win the King's consent" (III. 11. 62) and talking Herod into letting them
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stay married, she not only debunks male assumptions about the inadequacies of women and politics but also indicates that women know how to play the political game, just like Machiavelli’s Prince. She takes Pheroras into her confidence, as long as he will “tell the King that Constabarus hid the sons of Baba” (III.71), knowing Herod would kill Constabarus. Pheroras agrees to do her bidding, leaving Salome to reveal her entire plot to the reader in a joyous soliloquy. In her confession, she outlines to the reader the various levels at which she has manipulated and negated cultural norms. Because he would not divorce her, Salome implies that Constabarus’ “quick dispatch... from my mouth lesser credit find. /Yet shall he not decease without a match” (III. 81-83). This is just the first of many characters of the story that she will destroy. Since she cannot do it by divorcing him, she will have him killed by voicing her seemingly innocent revelations, using male assumptions to achieve her goals.

Salome’s voice is undeniably strong, whether there is a male presence or not. Although critics have interpreted her as openly deviant and enigmatic, none have identified her as the embodiment of the Machiavelle, which would establish a true female voice. I disagree with Boyd Berry when he says that it is only Salome’s voice which “persists in its wonderful if horrifying force after the return of patriarchy” (262). While hers is the dominant voice, I do not agree that true patriarchy returns. This leads back to why Salome is able to manipulate the society in which women are prisoners. Her subversions and voice are already recognizable to female readers. Cary does this because “Salome's understanding of the domestic hierarchy works to her advantage” (Ostman 197). Salome acknowledges patriarchal assumptions, is able to manipulate them in order to obtain her goals and is vocal in doing so. Women knew how to gain identity by
navigating their positions in a society where they were constantly subject to male
censure. This agrees with Merrill’s idea that “patriarchal institutions during Cary’s time
protected that prerogative with particularly virulent misogynistic discourses, whose
necessary objective was silencing women” (3). Women had to subvert the institutional
structures such as governmental standing, as well as publication, in order to gain success.

Most critics agree that Salome is manipulative, but unlike a vice character who is
emotionally charged, and eventually destroyed, she shows no remorse and the reader
finds out that she lives on in another location, away from the world of Herod and
Mariam. Cary’s tragedy strays from basic conventions where, in the end, the manipulator
becomes remorseful and looks to others in the hopes of rejuvenating the fallen society
that he or she has actually helped to corrupt. This is simply not the case for Salome, who
ultimately plays upon others and furthers an agenda, not just for herself, but for the
committed female reader. The world Cary reveals through Salome is bereft of hope. Even
though both of Cary’s female characters, Mariam and Salome, are vocal, their actions
bring extremely different ends. Because Cary’s Mariam adheres to societal norms and
denies a female bond with Salome and her questionable behaviors, she is destroyed.

Importantly, Salome manipulates that same system and is able to succeed, all without the
reader’s detection. It cannot be denied that Elizabeth Cary allows progressive and
prominently female thought to remain successful in her drama.
Chapter 3: Salome and Mariam: Sisters or Enemies

While it seems that Salome’s ultimate goal comes from her jealousy of all of the other characters in the play, she never fully succumbs to it. Mariam, on the other hand, becomes a ‘sacrificial lamb’ of sorts. Even though she is openly vocal in her concerns, she denies a female bond with others, and cleaves to the imposed class structure. Salome retaliates against Mariam’s rebuke of friendship as she tells her she “shall not linger long behind” (III.11.84), admitting that in doing so, she will see that “Herod's fear shall turn his love to hate” (III.11.90) by making him jealous and revealing his wife wishes him dead. Salome’s intentions are not solely based on the vice of jealousy. She will verbally destroy Mariam because she “should live my birth t'upbraid, to call me base and hungry Edomite” (III.11.93-94), which leads the reader to understand that Salome’s hatred of Mariam is not just because she has married Herod, but also because Mariam represents women who adhere to a patriarchal society, even though it silences them.

For many critics, Cary’s intent to present Salome as an agent of change for patriarchal society becomes problematic. Lyn Bennett argues that, through Salome, Cary is revealing the commonly held belief that unless a woman remains chaste, obedient and silent then she embodies the biblical character of Eve, who causes the downfall of mankind. Bennett contends that Salome not be studied singularly, but along with her female counterpart, Mariam. She places them diametrically opposite to one another and establishes that Mariam can be viewed as a victim of her society. In doing so, Bennett suggests that Cary does this to align her “female protagonist with Christ” (5) and thereby implies that Salome is not just evil, but also, and more importantly, is aligned with Eve, the woman who caused the downfall of man. Salome embodies the “the misogynistic type
of woman that had long been sustained by the biblical account of humanity's own creation and fall” because of her duplicity and open willfulness (8). According to Bennett, Cary is signifying that Salome exemplifies Swetnam’s “fro-ward woman.” Bennett’s argument that Cary places Salome at the end of the “bad spectrum” does not address that Cary reveals her success. Nor does she fully establish that Mariam is at direct odds with Salome, but shows that the two characters are in alignment, possibly representing a duality of character. I disagree with Bennett in that I feel that while both characters represent the plight of women, they are not two parts of a whole woman. I believe that Cary is revealing through Mariam what will happen if a woman denies a female bond and holds on to archaic societal constraints.

Salome’s character is comparable to Mariam’s in many ways, especially in her deviation from what was expected for women. Mariam is as openly vocal as Salome, yet is destroyed by the society to which she cleaves. Mariam is progressive in how she openly expresses her opinion; however, instead of being like Salome, who is independent and familiar with manipulating societal conventions, she succumbs to the dominant structure and gives in to a life tied to class, bringing her ultimate death. Mariam represents most seventeenth-century women submitted to the censure of the patriarchal structure. These women denied their own identities by conforming to the life that was structured for them. More importantly, they denied relationships with their own female counterparts, because they were dealing with misogynistic norms, and a strict class structure which denied them basic civil rights. Women had to navigate a system imposed on them, and in doing so, they became their own limitations. The conflict between Salome and Mariam becomes extremely evident, representing the static seventeenth-
century woman through Mariam and what would be considered the new, progressive independent woman through Salome.

The relationship between Salome and Mariam reflects the dramatic convention of stock vice through jealousy, but more importantly, enforces the diametric opposition between women—one who is jealous of her husbands' perceived affection for another woman as well as denied a feminine bond with her female counterpart, while the other seems not jealous, but angry at her entire dramatic situation. For the reader, Salome establishes her conflicts with Mariam when she claims that “more than once your choler I have born, your fumish words are sooner said than proved” (I. ll. 208-210). Mariam is governed by the social class system which becomes evident when she insults Salome as a “Mongrel, issued from [a] rejected race” (I. ll. 236) because she believes Salome is not of pure lineage. After this, Salome actually tries to reason with Mariam as well as explains how the gender norms she accepts put too much emphasis on societal constrictions: “what odds betwixt your ancestors and mine?” (I. ll. 240). She tries to appeal to Mariam and establish a reconciliation to form a female bond. She explains that they are “both born of Adam, both were made of earth, and both did come from Abraham’s line” (I. ll. 242). This forces Mariam to either accept Salome as one of her female peers or to reject her. But, Mariam, instead, chooses to subordinate Salome and refuses to grace her with any more words because it is beneath her status: “With thy black acts, I’ll not pollute my breath” (I. ll. 244). In denying Salome a female bond, Mariam reveals her attachment to the imposed social constraints of a male-dominated class structure. Mariam represents the blind acceptance that imprisoned women more than their male counterparts.
Salome also reveals, for the reader and others, that Mariam is not the quintessential seventeenth-century woman either. She raises a question of “More plotting yet?” to Mariam, insinuating that Mariam has previously spoken openly about how she wishes Herod’s death because “so oft you spent your suppliant breath” (I. II. 206-207). Again, she comments about Mariam’s “tongue that is so quickly moved” (I. II. 227), showing that Mariam is not as quiet as she should be and therefore not as obedient and silent as was expected of a good wife. Even though Salome knows she personally does not perform within womanly conventions, she reveals that neither does Mariam.

Salome’s prompting instigates Mariam to expound on the fact that she wishes “I thy brother’s face had never seen” (I.II.232), impressing that she wishes she was not married to Herod. However, even though Mariam does not like her husband, she does cling to societal class structure enforced by men and, sadly even women, and accepts her fate somewhat.

Mariam subjugates Salome further by slandering her and raising the connection between their respective husbands’ deaths. She comments that “Else, to my charge I might full justly lay a shameful life, besides a husband’s death” (I.II. 246), impressing that even though she may have accepted her husband’s death, Salome is far worse because she caused Josephus’s. Mariam extends the insult that “in Joseph’s stead her Constabarus placed to free herself, she had not used the art to slander hapless Mariam for unchaste” (I.II.256-258), revealing her thoughts that Salome doesn’t deserve her friendship because instead of pining away for Josephus after his death, Salome marries Constabarus. This prompts Mariam to remember how Salome accuses Mariam of having an affair with Josephus. Therefore, she further denies a relationship with Salome because
her own reputation has been slandered. As the voice of contemporary society, Mariam’s denial shows that Salome will always be below convention and “base,” even though Salome does try to forge a relationship. Finally, Mariam believes that if Salome had not slandered her, perhaps an alliance could have been forged, but, instead, Alexandra steps in and takes Mariam away, leaving Salome to stew in her thoughts, providing a catalyst for her plans. Salome openly voices her revenge on the society that has continually placed her lower in stature, much like Mariam who places her within that same societal structure.

Elizabeth Cary reveals what can happen to a woman who blindly accepts male dominated limits when Mariam is eventually destroyed. For Cary, Mariam’s death represents women who did not know how to break the cycle that continually kept them subordinate. Mariam voices concerns over her husband’s motivations and indicates that she believes he is unfeeling. She contends that if her husband had actually loved her instead of killing her brother and grandsire then perhaps she would have cared for him. She admits she “cannot frame disguise, nor [that she] never taught/ my face a look dissenting from my thought” (IV. II. 144-145). She cannot hide her conflicted feelings, yet she does not know how to embrace her evil thoughts toward her husband and achieve agency. She cannot trust Herod because he cannot be trusted. He killed all those who would affect his wife. Therefore she is openly vocal when she states she “will not build on so unstable ground” (IV.II.147) as Herod appeals to her to build on their love. Finally, she says that “They can tell/That say I loved thee; Mariam says not so” (IV. II. 193-194), which seals her deathly fate. While he does not wish her dead, Herod knows she cannot live because she is vocally opposing the societal structure by not paying him the due he
feels he deserves. He adheres to the popular notion set by Joseph Swetnam and other men when he succumbs to his jealous thoughts of her: “with Joseph, I remember her disgrace” (IV. II. 506). While Mariam is progressive in her open expression of denying Herod’s world, she also denies a friendship with Salome, therefore placing herself in limbo, so to speak. Herod represents the status quo because his jealousy forces him to kill what he loves the most, Mariam, and sends him into an unstable future. Because her vocal manipulations help her to be identifiable, they also eventually stifle her, denying personal identity.

Establishing a definitive female identity in literature, especially drama, presents a paradox. Susan Sniader Lanser has established the female voice in fictional narrative texts of the 18th century and after, in ways that can apply to Elizabeth Cary’s *TTOM*, especially to its main character Salome. Feminist theory believes that female voice is usually “referring to the behavior of actual or fictional persons and groups who assert woman-centered points of view” (4). Salome’s actions and voice exemplify what a woman needed to do in order to achieve success in the oppressive society. In order for an interpretation to be credible, Lanser believes that “work, author, narrator, character, or textual practice” must be placed in conjunction, meaning that in order for a work to be recognized as establishing voice, it must be “characterized with respect to specific receiving communities” (6). Cary’s Salome definitely targets the widening female readership which would have been comprised of newly educated, middle class women who were not strangers to what dictated the world in which they lived. However, Lanser also discusses how narrative authority is obtainable because the “narrator’s status conforms to [the] dominant social power” (6). Since Salome’s voice and actions go
against popular notions, it is undeniable that she succeeds through her subversion of those same constraints, giving her what Lanser believes is discursive authority. Cary undoubtedly recognizes societal conventions and gives both of her strong female characters very different outcomes. Mariam, because she adheres to them in denying Salome, is destroyed and Salome, who questions and subverts them openly and manipulates them privately, succeeds.

Like Bennett, other critics, such as Catherine Belsey and Betty Travitsky try to establish that Cary is using Salome as redemptive and progressive, but they only succeed in acknowledging that her character is somewhat ambivalent, meaning that she cannot be placed as good or evil, but possibly represents the paradox of being a woman, much like Cary would have experienced during her own time period. Neither acknowledges her success as representing something new for literature and for the female readership, nor do they further the discussion of Salome as a Machiavellian. In fact, for them, and others, Salome’s character just “rides off into the sunset,” never to be thought of again.

Karen Raber also establishes that Cary’s “discounting the propriety of Mariam embodies as obedience to illogical rules. Salome portrays issues of gender, will, and self-determination in terms of status, and cynical manipulation of discourses of law and religion” (335). Therefore, Cary is actually presenting personal commentary, especially because as a female she produces a text that is published. It would seem that, for Raber, because of the fact that Salome uses Machiavellian thoughts in order to gain “the benefits of an access to Herod” (335), she is extremely progressive. This is because, according to prevalent societal thought, the wife, Mariam should have that opportunity, not his sister, Salome. Raber further claims that Cary’s intent is personal because Salome seems to defy
the “patriarchal order, both domestically and politically” (335) especially any code that could “define or contain her character.” If this is true, then Cary presents the possibility that women can establish their own identities through subversive action and they do not have to be silent about it. But what if the author’s intent is completely removed from the discussion? The only way to establish Salome as an agent of change is by looking at her character as an entity in itself without considering Cary’s personal intention. By recognizing Salome’s actions as a projection of Cary’s own feminist agenda, it becomes evident that Salome’s character is the voice of what was quickly becoming the dominant female role.
By allowing Salome to succeed, Elizabeth Cary offers a bold commentary about a flawed patriarchal culture and questions if it will be ultimately redeemable. She first shows Salome’s lack of remorse when she leaves Herod to his emotional upheaval over Mariam’s death: “Tis no time to purge me now though of a guiltless crime.” These lines reveal that Salome does not view what she has done as criminal. She forces Herod to look at Mariam objectively and questions her loyalty. Because he was already curious about that guilt, Salome plants a seed of jealousy that finally consumes him enough to kill Mariam. It is only when Salome begins to defend Mariam’s actions that Herod begins to question Mariam’s true intentions. She tricks Herod when he says “can you live without her?” (IV. II. 381) and Salome responds “How should I try” (IV. II. 385). By showing Salome’s presumed concern, Salome is able to manipulate Herod by revealing that Mariam’s beauty has tricked him into seeing only that, “Tis time to speak, for Herod sure forgets that Mariam’s very tresses hide deceit” (IV. II. 418-420). He agrees that he believes she has been unfaithful, even though he is torn up about it. It takes Salome to say that Mariam “speaks a beauteous language, but within, her heart is false as powder, and her tongue doth but allure the auditors to sin” (IV. II. 428-430) for Herod to begin to agree that Mariam is “unchaste.” She then argues once again that if the executioner murders her then he “must be both deaf and blind, for if he see, he needs must see the stars that shine on either side of Mariam’s face” (IV. II. 439-440), giving Mariam a bewitching persona. He is so enamored by her beauty that Salome has great difficulty persuading him to destroy her.
When Herod finally seems to agree with Salome, she once again brings up Mariam’s infidelity with “Shamus’ love.” It is with Salome’s final insinuation that it was because of Mariam that both Josephus and Shamus were executed that Herod finally acknowledges it. Without Salome’s revelations and pressuring, he would have “not have doubted Mariam’s innocence; But still had held her in my heart pure” (IV. ll. 514-515). Salome’s pressures are enough to make him permanently distrust Mariam. Even though he is blinded by her beauty, he finally acknowledges that he does not actually trust her, which also reinforces the inherent distrust of all women by seventeenth century society.

In using her Machiavellian guile to indict Mariam, Salome is freeing women from patriarchal authority by destroying the image of the obedient woman. Unlike the cultural norm where a wife should be her husband’s confidante, Salome is able to manipulate her brother’s, King Herod’s, feelings as he vacillates in his dilemma of what to do with a wife who is openly vocal yet whom he loves dearly. Salome plays upon his somewhat feminine traits of fickleness as he first takes one side and then another concerning his wife’s fate. First, he commands that she be “take[n to] her death” (III.235), but then quickly changes his resolution: “Come back come back! What meant me to deprive the world of light” (III. ll. 236)? He is so conflicted about Mariam because “Love and Hate do fight.” He loves Mariam’s beauty because, for him, her “looks alone preserved” his breath. On the other hand, he resolves that “she lived too wantonly, and therefore shall she never more be free” (III.256-257). Just like dominant society’s view of women, her looks are valued whereas her vocal honesty is denounced. His conflict between beauty and wantonness reveal again the prominent notion that one equals the other. While a husband wishes a beautiful wife, he fears her believed wantonness, much like Swetnam’s
“un-constant woman.” Herod is so unsure of his own emotions and judgment that he becomes enmeshed in a conversation with Salome that will ultimately lead to Mariam’s death. Salome plays upon Herod’s blind fawning over Mariam’s beauty by changing her. He believes Mariam’s beauty will protect her because, since it is a natural beauty, it relates with the natural world and therefore is indestructible. It is only when Salome reverses her strategy that Herod begins to be swayed. By influencing Herod’s decision to have his wife beheaded, Salome uses the idea that beauty and silent obedience should not be valued, and must be destroyed in order to open the way for the progressive and independent woman. Mariam’s death becomes a symbolic and necessary evil to pave the way for identity.

Salome’s success finally emphasizes the possibility of an alternate world where she, as representative for all women, can live in freedom. It is not Salome’s voice alone that destroys Mariam. She cannot feign love for her husband, Herod, because she cannot forgive his murder of his family: “Your offers to my heart no ease can grant/Except they could my brother’s life restore... [Had] you not desired to make her sad/ my brother nor grandsire had not died!” (VI.11.111-114). It is unforgiveable to Mariam that her husband, Herod killed her family in order to usurp the throne. She reveals she will not love Herod when she says, “I cannot frame disguise, nor never taught/ My face a look dissenting from my thought” (IV.4.144-145), meaning she will never forgive him for killing her family. For the reader, her words establish that it is not only through Salome’s revenge that she is killed, but more for voicing her own opinion. While she denigrates Salome according to misogynistic class structures, she cannot accept or love a husband who murders and wants to create a world on such an “unstable ground.” It is not just that she
openly voices her denial of her husband’s actions and her love, but more so her belief in class structures. Her actions against Salome tell the reader that by not accepting her as an equal, she distances herself from what society would see as immoral. Mariam’s unladylike actions of speaking openly and not revealing sorrow at the proposed death of her husband reveals she is truly not as innocent as the title would suppose.

Cary creates a feminine malcontent in Salome who is allowed to succeed even though she openly berates other characters who are considered “less than virtuous.” Her character negates all three traits which society imposed on women: obedience, silence and chastity. Merrill places both women on a spectrum because both Mariam and Salome represent “the dual halves of the creator’s subjectivity” (7). She negates the ideas of other critics by not placing them at direct odds with one another. I believe that by adhering to dominant class structure in her actions, voice and eventual demise, Mariam represents the typical seventeenth-century woman, while Salome’s character truly gives agency to women who knew how to navigate their society, yet were afraid to openly show no regret in doing so.
Conclusion: Necessary Evil and Feminine Agency

Because of her motivations and ultimate success, Cary’s Salome is definitely a female Machiavellian character. In Cary’s play, Machiavellianism functions as a necessary evil, giving women the ability to subvert patriarchy and exert the agency that it denies them. In dramatic terms, Salome’s character can be aligned with the stereotypical character of vice in drama, but instead of viewed as the Devil or just ambiguously manipulative, she actually has a vested interest in manipulating others for personal gain. That is one reason why audiences fell in love with the Machiavellian villain and in Cary’s TTOM, Salome definitely exudes these traits. Once again, drama affected audiences so that they quickly realized they could sacrifice personal virtue for political power. These characters praise brutality not “for its own sake” but each “advocates its politic use as a necessary evil” (Riebling 283). For this play, morality becomes subjective, based on the power of manipulation and the presence of a dominant feminine voice. This is much like Salome’s character, whose voice and actions openly negate male-dominated constraints placed upon women. Cary’s play forced the woman’s voice out into the open, for both male and, especially, female readers. It is important to note that Salome’s voice is the connection between reader and work. Salome is the ultimate Machiavelle, because she achieves a feminist agenda by manipulating the masculine dominated society and thereby gives women agency and a recognizable voice in literature.

Salome’s character definitely portrays values that were recognizably bad, such as her flaunting vanity, her complete disregard for the sanctity of marriage and her denial of societal law. But as bad as these traits might seem, they reflect on and anticipate more modern ideas of the feminine. She discusses her own looks in comparison with what
society defined as beautiful or proper, and ignores these popular beliefs. She negates propriety when she openly discusses her intentions with the audience/reader, going against the idea that women must remain silent, and helps women realize they have opinions worth being heard. She then disobey her male counterparts by controlling her brother, Herod, and denying her husband while fulfilling her own passions. As Salome subverts the predominantly male system, Cary seems to encourage her audience to recognize that women might be able to control or at least have a say in their own destinies if they “play” the system by subverting societal values without alerting their male counterparts to what is happening. Readers, especially women, could recognize that it was possible to maintain a positive outward appearance while navigating a misogynistic society that impeded personal freedoms of expression and gender identity.

Salome is a true Machiavelle, yet she is not destroyed in the end of this drama as in other Senecan tragedies. Much like the evolution of tragedy in general, Salome’s character seems to evolve from the innocent protagonist of earlier years into progressive thought. She remains committed to a feminist agenda in that she vocally outlines her goals for the reader/viewer and adheres to them without fault and without remorse. She manipulates the downfall of all her surrounding characters and achieves the ultimate goal of marrying another man and implying to the audience she will live “happily ever after.” Through her machinations she gains vengeance as well as her own prosperity for the future. By showcasing this enigmatic feminine voice, Cary makes a powerful statement that women could manipulate social conventions for themselves and achieve success. In The Tragedy of Mariam, Mariam, the only woman who is truly silenced, is destroyed by her own need to hold on to archaic patriarchal class structure. In contrast, Cary’s Salome
shows women how to navigate a flawed male-dominated system to achieve their personal ends, thereby establishing agency for the new modern woman.
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