'Her body is divided from her head': beheading and biblical intertexuality in Elizabeth Cary's the Tragedy of Mariam

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'Her body is divided from her head': Beheading and Biblical Intertextuality in Elizabeth Cary's *The Tragedy of Mariam*

Abstract:
Elizabeth Cary's play, *The Tragedy of Mariam* (1613), culminates with the execution by beheading of the play's protagonist on the orders of her husband, the tyrannical Herod the Great. By executing Mariam, Herod attempts to re-establish his authority in Jerusalem after a rumour of his death has unleashed a wave of resistance and instability across his state. This article focuses upon the choice of beheading as the mode of execution and argues that the play's biblical setting invites comparisons with Old Testament representations of beheading (including those in the stories of David and Judith). These beheadings occur as part of narratives of resistance against tyranny and overbearing patriarchs. The article argues that Herod's attempts to harness beheading as a means of stabilising his state, as well as the broader cultural recognition of headlessness as a symbol of feminine disorder, are offset by the anti-tyrannical and anti-patriarchal properties of biblical beheading.

Keywords: Elizabeth Cary, early modern, *The Tragedy of Mariam*, beheading, intertextuality

The final act of Elizabeth Cary's play, *The Tragedy of Mariam* (published 1613), details the fallout following the execution ordered by Herod the Great of his wife, Mariam. As Herod begins to realise the implications of the sentence of death he had imposed upon his queen, and to regret his actions, he asks the Nuntio delivering the report of her death if there is 'no trick to make her breathe again' (5.1.89).[1] To this desperate question the Nuntio replies, somewhat indelicately, that 'Her body is divided from her head' (5.1.90). Whilst Herod's question may appear somewhat absurd, it is, in actual fact, somehow fitting in a play that continually underlines the unreliability of reports of deaths, as well as dramatising the implications of responding too readily to such accounts. The action of the first three acts of Cary's play revolves around a report of Herod's death which, in spite of its inaccuracy, unleashes a wave of subversive energies that had previously been contained by Herod's

[1] All parenthetical references to the primary text are taken from Elizabeth Cary, *The Tragedy of Mariam* (Arden Early Modern Drama), ed. by Ramona Wray (London: Bloomsbury, 2012).

tyranny with individuals pondering, as Mariam's mother Alexandra puts it, how 'to deal in this reversed state' (1.2.126). Various characters either contemplate or actively initiate courses of action that would have been unthinkable under Herod's rule: Mariam aims to refashion a new identity for herself that is untrammelled by the influence of Herod; Herod's brother, Pheroras, sets in motion his plan to marry his beloved Graphina instead of the juvenile relation that Herod had intended for him; Herod's sister, Salome, attempts to subvert societal precedents by planning to initiate divorce proceedings against her husband, Constabarus; and Constabarus also takes advantage of Herod's apparent death by releasing the sons of Babas, for whom he had been providing a refuge instead of obeying Herod's order to kill them. When he returns in the fourth act, Herod is therefore faced with a range of challenges to his authority, both familial and political.

The theme of responding prematurely to news of deaths is emphasised in the play's second chorus, the topic of which is the effect of the unmeasured and irrational responses provoked by hearing news with 'ears prejudicate' (2.Chor.1). The Chorus here comment upon how

> The greatest part of us, prejudicate,
> With wishing Herod's death do hold it true;
> The being once deluded doth not bate
> The credit to a better likelihood due (2.Chor.19-22).

Pheroras comments that Herod's death has provided him with the 'wished liberty' he has been seeking; the same is evidently true of the Chorus speakers, who readily accept the news of Herod's death because such a development would allow them to realise the hopes that had been suppressed by his tyranny. However, there are also those whose actions have been influenced by the news of Herod's death who entertain the possibility of the news turning out to be untrue. Pheroras, for example, vows to continue defying Herod even if his dead body should 'leave the sepulchre / And entertain the severed ghost again' (2.1.81-2), whilst the first son of Babas is rebuked for advising a more cautious response to the news when Constabarus asks, 'art thou turned a coward… / That thou begin'st to doubt undoubted truth'

(2.2.69-70). As a result of these rumours, there is a certain irony to the observation made by Constabarus as he and the sons of Babas are led to be executed for treachery when he states that 'here we step our last, the way to death; / We must not tread this way a second time' (4.6.1-2). Given that the play has continually been stressing the ambiguities in the boundary between life and death, Herod's questioning the Nuntio about whether or not there is 'some trick to make [Mariam] breathe again' manages to achieve a certain logic within the framework established by Cary's play. The Nuntio's response that 'Her body is divided from her head' is thus suggestive that the severed head represents an unquestionable signifier of death. In her book, *The Severed Head: Capital Visions*, Julia Kristeva observes that 'The thoroughly displayed beheading signals the end point of the visible. The show is over, ladies and gentlemen, move on! There is nothing more to see!'[2] The Nuntio's unqualified observation that Mariam has been beheaded therefore represents an unambiguous and definitive report of her death.

In many ways, the motif of beheading frames this play. Within its very first few lines, we are presented with a famous historical encounter with a severed head, as Mariam rhetorically asks,

> How oft have I with public voice run on
> To censure Rome's last hero for deceit
> Because he wept when Pompey's life was gone,
> Yet when he lived, he thought his name too great? (1.1.1-4)

Here Mariam evokes the famous instance recorded in Plutarch of Julius Caesar ('Rome's last hero') weeping as he was presented with the severed head of Pompey as a means of providing a precedent to help understand the unexpected grief she experiences as a result of hearing about Herod's death.[3] As well as providing an historical example as a point of comparison

[2] Julia Kristeva, *The Severed Head: Capital Visions*, trans. by Jody Gladding (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), p. 89.
[3] These episodes are recounted in Plutarch's *Lives*; see *Pompey*, 80 and *Caesar*, 48.

with her own situation in which 'One object yields both grief and joy' (1.1.10), the image of the death of Pompey also serves as a grim presage of Mariam's own fate.

Margaret W. Ferguson is one of the earliest critics to highlight the significance of Mariam's death by beheading, noting that the plays goes beyond its principal narrative source, Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews* in an English translation by Thomas Lodge (1602), by 'specifying the mode of Mariam's death; Josephus simply says that Herod ordered her executed, whereas in Cary's play, there is considerable emphasis on the "fact" that she is beheaded'.[4] By going beyond her source in this way, Cary opens up the representation of her protagonist's death to a broad range of historical, cultural, and biblical associations. In this article, I focus primarily upon the latter of these groups and highlight the ways in which Cary's play opens up parallels with a number of notable depictions of beheadings in the Bible. One of the most prominent of these parallels is between Mariam's execution and the Gospels' account of the martyrdom of John the Baptist – particularly the ways in which a ruler named Herod is provoked into beheading a virtuous martyr by a woman named Salome – with a number of significant connections noted by critics.[5] Alongside such parallels, I aim to show here that the play also invites comparisons with hitherto overlooked Old Testament representations of beheading, including the decapitation of Goliath after suffering the fatal blow from David's sling-shot and the beheading of Holofernes, the tyrannical general to King Nebuchadnezzar, as recorded in the book of Judith. By situating *The Tragedy of Mariam* alongside these biblical accounts of beheadings, as well as the responses to them in early

[4] Margaret W. Ferguson, 'The Spectre of Resistance: *The Tragedy of Mariam* (1613)' in *Staging the Renaissance: Reinterpretations of Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama*, ed. by David Scott Kastan and Peter Stallybrass (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 235-50 (p. 245).

[5] In the introduction to their edition of the play, for example, Barry Weller and Margaret W. Ferguson relate the allusions to John the Baptist to the play's comments upon the execution of Anne Boleyn, seeing the biblical parallels as part of a wider topical schema. See 'Introduction' to Elizabeth Cary, *The Tragedy of Mariam, the Fair Queen of Jewry, with The Lady Falkland Her Life*, ed. by Barry Weller and Margaret W. Ferguson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 1-59 (esp. pp. 20-2 and p. 34). Weller and Ferguson also note that 'Herodias's daughter, who is not named in the Bible but who corresponds to a historical and later legendary Salome (of "the seven veils") was readily conflated with Herod the Great's sister Salome, the villainess of Cary's tragedy' (p. 21). See also Hopkins, p. 163.

modern religious and political and theological commentaries, I aim to show that these intertexts have significant bearings upon the play's interrogation of such topics as gender, tyranny, and the establishment of sovereign power. In particular, I argue that these biblical parallels generate tensions in the associations with beheading: on the one hand, beheading can represent a radical act of resistance to tyranny and patriarchal excess (as in the case of the stories of David and Judith); on the other, however, beheading represents an atrocity committed by a weak tyrant (as is the case in the narrative of John's death). By having Mariam executed by beheading, Herod sets out to re-establish his tyrannical rule in a way that forecloses the more radical associations with beheading by muting his protagonist's agency and presenting a quite literal realisation of a motif associating feminine disorder with the figure of the headless woman.

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The play's representation of the death of Mariam has stimulated a rich variety of critical responses to Cary's tragedy, highlighting the play's engagement with both religious and topical concerns. Margaret W. Ferguson, for example, has argued that the added specification about the manner of Mariam's execution carries with it some decidedly loaded topic significance through its potential to remind the play's readers of the executions of both Anne Boleyn and Mary, Queen of Scots; in this way, it emerges as 'an overdetermined and historically volatile allusion' to recent historical events that still carried considerable political significance when Cary was writing.[6] Ferguson's readings also build upon the work of Elaine V. Beilin, who presented the influential argument that the play represents Mariam as a proto-Christian martyr whose execution repeatedly alludes to the passion of Christ.[7] Frances E. Dolan also focuses upon the representation of Mariam on the scaffold and situates it

[6] Ibid. For further discussion of the topical significance of these allusions, see Lisa Hopkins, *The Female Hero in English Renaissance Tragedy* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 150-68.
[7] Elaine V. Beilin, *Redeeming Eve: Women Writers of the English Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), pp. 157-76.

alongside numerous other narratives of Protestant martyrs, a point further developed by Erin E. Kelly who highlights the ways in which the play acts as a critique of the frequent tendency to obscure the rebellious natures of the protagonists in early modern narratives of martyrdom.[8]

Consideration of Elizabeth Cary's play in relation to the broader dramatic context must also take into consideration the ambiguous cultural status of the play, which has long been noted. The play can, in one sense, be seen as the culmination of a wave of neo-Senecan dramatic writing, often labelled as 'closet drama', which had enjoyed a brief vogue during the 1590s and into the first decade of James's reign.[9] Following the publication of Mary Sidney's *Antonius* (1592), a translation of *Marc-Antoine* by the French dramatist Robert Garnier, a number of other writers followed this precedent for producing drama that focused more upon debate than action and upon rhetoric rather than spectacle. These included Samuel Daniel, Samuel Brandon, Thomas Kyd, Fulke Greville, and Sir William Alexander. For much of the twentieth century, the prevailing critical views on this group of dramas tended to characterise them as an active repudiation of the outputs from the commercial theatres and as the products of a somewhat reactionary attempt to promote a neo-classical mode of drama in the style of Seneca that would revive the unity and decorum of the ancients which practitioners of the commercial theatres had apparently abandoned.[10] In more recent decades, however, such

[8] See Frances E. Dolan, '"Gentlemen, I Have One Thing More to Say": Women on Scaffolds in England, 1563-1680', *Modern Philology* 92.2 (1994), 157-78 (esp. pp. 163-5), and Erin E. Kelly, '*Mariam* and Early Modern Discourses of Martyrdom' in *The Literary Career and Legacy of Elizabeth Cary, 1613-1680*, ed. by Heather E. Wolfe (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 35-52. For further comment on the play's critiques of dynastic politics, see Elizabeth Mazzola, *The Pathology of the English Renaissance: Sacred Remains and Holy Ghosts* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), pp. 85-103 and Michelle M. Dowd, 'Dramaturgy and the Politics of Space in *The Tragedy of Mariam*', *Renaissance Drama* 44.1 (2016), 101-22.

[9] The development of this wave of drama is analysed in Marta Straznicky, '"Profane Stoical Paradoxes": *The Tragedie of Mariam* and Sidneian Closet Drama', *English Literary Renaissance* 24 (1994), 104-34; Karen Raber, *Dramatic Difference: Gender, Class, and Genre in the Early Modern Closet Drama* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2001); and Daniel Cadman, *Sovereigns and Subjects in Early Modern Neo-Senecan Drama* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015). The relationship between 'closet' writing, women's self-expression, and discourses on women's behaviour is considered in Miranda Garno Nesler, 'Closeted Authority in *The Tragedy of Mariam*', *Studies in English Literature* 52.2 (2012), 363-85.

[10] The most notable exponent of this view was T.S. Eliot in his essay, 'Seneca in Elizabethan Translation' in *Elizabethan Dramatists* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), pp. 11-57. See also A.M. Witherspoon, *The Influence*

views of a mobilised campaign against the commercial theatres have largely been abandoned with Lukas Erne, for example, arguing that the 'closet' and popular traditions of dramatic writing should be viewed as 'complementary rather than antagonistic in the influence they exerted'.[11] A substantial range of recent criticism has highlighted Elizabeth Cary's *Mariam* as a compelling case for this kind of complementarity with the drama of the commercial theatres. Rosemary Kegl has notably highlighted the play as representing 'a crisis in genre' due to its compression of wide-ranging events into the confines of a decorous twenty-four-hour time period in a way that can be likened to the kinds of temporal compression which Sir Philip Sidney regarded as one of the key aesthetic travesties perpetrated in popular theatrical drama.[12] Other critics, including Alison Findlay, Andrew Hiscock, Michelle M. Dowd, and Lara Dodds have made further important interventions that outline the dramaturgical impact of Cary's treatment of space and time in *Mariam*.[13]

Although the principal source for Elizabeth Cary's play is Flavius Josephus' account of Mariam's death in his *Antiquities of the Jews*, most probably in Thomas Lodge's translation of *The Famous and Most Memorable Works*, it is, in an important sense, a Biblical play.[14] Ramona Wray notes that 'Beyond Cary's reading of Josephus lies a thorough familiarity with

of Robert Garnier on Elizabethan Drama (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1924). In his study of the Senecan influence on early modern drama, Gordon Braden dismissed the influence of this tradition of dramatic writing as, ultimately, 'a fairly elite and circumscribed affair'; see *Renaissance Tragedy and the Senecan Tradition: Anger's Privilege* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 171.

[11] Lukas Erne, *Beyond 'The Spanish Tragedy': A Study of the Works of Thomas Kyd* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), p. 212.

[12] Rosemary Kegl, 'Theaters, Households and a "Kind of History" in Elizabeth Cary's *The Tragedy of Mariam*' in *Enacting Gender on the English Renaissance Stage*, ed. by Viviana Comensoli and Anne Russell (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999), pp. 135-53 (p. 143).

[13] See Alison Findlay, *Playing Spaces in Early Women's Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 31-9; Andrew Hiscock, *The Uses of this World: Thinking Space in Shakespeare, Marlowe, Cary and Jonson* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004), pp. 114-41; Dowd, 'Dramaturgy and the Politics of Space'; and Lara Dodds, 'Passionate Time in Elizabeth Cary's *The Tragedy of Mariam*' in *Temporality, Genre and Experience in the Age of Shakespeare: Forms of Time*, ed. by Lauren Shohet (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2018), pp. 189-204

[14] For further comment on the relationship between Josephus' *Antiquities* and English drama, see Peter Auger, 'Playing Josephus on the English Stage', *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 23.3 (2016), 326-32. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12138-016-0406-6

the Bible', particularly the Old Testament.[15] As well as having Herod the Great, the king responsible for the Slaughter of the Innocents recorded in the Gospels, as one of its principal characters, Cary's play also draws upon the Bible in a number of more allusive ways, partly by making reference to numerous notable Biblical figures, including Sarah, Joshua, Abel, Jesse and Jonathan, and Achtiophel, as well as having the action take place in a location with distinct Biblical resonances. This extensive engagement with such a range of Old Testament material further aligns this play with the theatrical culture of early modern England. Over the last few decades, commentators have challenged the idea that the relationship between biblical subjects and English drama went into a sharp decline following the English Reformation. Paul Whitfield White, for example, challenges such assumptions – in particular, the idea that 'the Reformation inflicted a fatal blow to religious entertainments, and that the Civil War, a century or so later, finished off secular ones' – by attending to English provincial traditions and highlighting that although 'the theological and institutional bases for much religious drama was swept away at the Reformation… there is compelling evidence to show that it survived or recovered in many parishes in the first half of Elizabeth's reign and continued on a diminished scale thereafter'.[16] Similarly, the prevalence of biblical drama in the popular repertories has often been overlooked, especially the place of a number of lost dramas that had biblical subjects as their sources. As Annaliese Connolly notes, during 'the period between c.1590 and c.1602 contemporary records such as Philip Henslowe's *Diary* and the Stationers' register indicate that at least thirteen biblical plays were commissioned, written or performed for the Elizabethan theatre audience'.[17] However, recent scholarship has also highlighted the fact that biblical resonances abounded in a large

[15] Wray, p. 14.
[16] Paul Whitfield White, *Drama and Religion in English Provincial Society, 1485-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 211.
[17] Annaliese Connolly, 'Peele's *David and Bethsabe*: Reconsidering Biblical Drama of the Long 1590s', *Early Modern Literary Studies*, Special Issue 16 (2007) 9.1-20 <URL: http://purl.oclc.org/emls/si-16/connpeel.htm> [accessed 29 August 2018].

range of plays that did not contain any explicitly biblical subject matter, in the forms of quotations, references, and allusions.[18] A number of commentators have also pointed out that one potential reason for such an abundance of dramatic allusions was the affinity between the experience of hearing a play in the theatre to hearing the word being preached; Bryan Crockett has suggested a substantial two-way traffic in stylistic influence and oral performance between the stage and the pulpit and that the 'substantial audience overlap between the two modes meant that preachers could assume a high degree of receptivity to oral performance, as the playwrights could assume their audiences' tendency to cast their experiences in religious terms'.[19] Hannibal Hamlin has also emphasised the 'similar experience of hearing the Bible in the church and the theater' and that 'the experience of hearing the Bible in worship conditioned early modern audiences to recognize biblical allusion in plays'.[20]

Drama of this period therefore highlights not only the widespread knowledge of the Bible amongst early modern dramatists, but also the fact that they could reasonably expect biblical allusions to receive broad recognition amongst their diverse theatrical audiences. Adrian Streete has also pointed out that such recognitions may well have extended beyond the stage and into print editions of early modern plays: 'embedded scriptural quotation is an important feature of a large range of early modern texts. It does not seem implausible that readers would have read embedded biblical quotations in plays with any less care than in other texts'.[21] This is especially significant for Elizabeth Cary's *The Tragedy of Mariam*, a play that straddles both print and performance as modes for its reception. Michelle M. Dowd

[18] For recent analyses of the prevalence and significance of biblical allusions in early modern dramas, see for example, Brownlee, *Biblical Readings*; Groves, *Texts and Traditions*; Hannibal Hamlin, *The Bible in Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); and the essays in Adrian Streete (ed.), *Early Modern Drama and the Bible: Contexts and Readings, 1570-1625* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).
[19] Bryan Crockett, *The Play of Paradox: Stage and Sermon in Renaissance England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), p. 7.
[20] Hamlin, p. 41.
[21] Adrian Streete, 'Introduction: Situating the Bible in Early Modern Drama' in *Early Modern Drama and the Bible: Contexts and Readings, 1570-1625* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 1-23 (p. 6).

argues that it can be likened to other 'closet' plays that 'were, through their formal structures and print histories, intentionally aligned with elite readerly and interpretive communities, but they were also connected to performance traditions shared with the commercial theater'.[22] *Mariam* can thus be regarded as doubly allusive through its affinities with both an oral, performance tradition and with a printed readerly tradition. The biblical setting and the theme of dynastic and genealogical tensions that stretch as far back as the first book of the Old Testament make these allusions even more conspicuous and striking.

Attending to the play's biblical parallels also reveals the alignment between Cary's allusions and the broader prominence of the Bible in early modern society and culture. In this way, her practices of allusion can be compared to those which Beatrice Groves discusses in relation to Shakespeare, whose 'audience not only knew the Bible but could be relied on to bring their knowledge to what they saw on stage'.[23] This view of Shakespeare demonstrates how an early modern theatrical audience would have been expected to register the significance of biblical allusions and relate them to dramatic representations taking place on the stage. My reading of *Mariam* will aim to build upon these ideas and highlight that the significance of such allusions can also be discerned in dramatic writing beyond the commercial theatre and particularly in forms of drama that draw more closely upon classical traditions of drama. In her analysis of the cultural resonances of the Bible, Victoria Brownlee similarly points out the potential importance of biblical allusions by observing that the 'movement from biblical page to another medium necessarily involves elements of reconstruction or renovation. The act of rewriting the scriptures is always an interpretive one'.[24] This, I argue, is certainly the case in *Mariam* in which the representation of beheading and the setting of the drama in

[22] Dowd, 102.
[23] Beatrice Groves, *Texts and Traditions: Religion in Shakespeare 1592-1604* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 11.
[24] Victoria Brownlee, *Biblical Readings and Literary Writings in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 5.

Jerusalem can initiate comment upon a number of issues, including those relating to tyranny and patriarchal power. Beatrice Groves has also observed that during the early modern period, the 'currency and status of the Bible made it a uniquely powerful source, and a brief allusion to a biblical story could open up a fund of associations, ambiguities, and analogues'.[25] Cary's play is a prime example of the potentially polysemic qualities of such moments of biblical intertextuality, with the representation of beheading evoking associations with both tyrannical rule and resistance.[26]

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Cary's choice of subject matter and setting provides opportunities for her to dramatize the enduring effects of a number of Biblical narratives in the Judean society represented in the play. In one of the subplots, involving Herod's sister Salome and her husband Constabarus, the play examines the bearings of the Mosaic law relating to divorce and the significance this has upon women's status within Hebrew society, as depicted in the play. More significantly, one of the central premises of the play is informed by the story of Jacob and Esau as recorded in the Book of Genesis. The play explores the consequences of Esau famously selling his birth-right for a mess of pottage and, as a result, ensuring that the lineage of the people of

[25] Groves, p. 25.

[26] The use of the term 'intertextuality' must take into account the fact that it has had something of a vexed history since it was coined by Julia Kristeva; for an early outlining of this theory, see, for example, 'Word, Dialogue and Novel' in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. by Toril Moi (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), pp. 34-61. My use of the term is influenced by the more specialised definitions offered by Gérard Genette, in response to Kristeva, as 'a relationship of copresence between two texts or among several texts: that is to say, eidetically and typically as the actual presence of one text within another'. I also draw on Genette's definition of *allusion* as one category of intertextuality: 'an enunciation whose full meaning presupposes the perception of a relationship between it and another text, to which it necessarily refers by some inflections that would otherwise remain unintelligible'. See Gérard Gennette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, trans. by Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), pp. 1-2. I similarly acknowledge Carmela Perri's theories of literary allusion, in which an 'alluding text directs our attention to one or more attributes of the source text necessary to comprehend the meaning of the allusion. These attributes of associate meanings are "recoverable" for the given audience – that is, they are part of the source text's connotation, which is public knowledge for a common cultural group. Contemplation of the linked texts may activate further patterns between them, or the marked text may evoke properties of texts other than itself… any of which affect the significance… of the alluding text… the alluding text may also modify the significance of the attributes of the source text it evokes; but whether or not it does so, these attributes always affect it'; see 'On Alluding', *Poetics* 7(3) (1978), 289-307 (p. 296).

Israel would be traced back to Jacob. The effects of this are made apparent from the play's Argument, in which Herod is identified as an 'Idumean' and, throughout the play as an Edomite, both clearly marking him as a descendant of Esau, evoking the complex historical associations of the term. Weller and Ferguson outline such complexities in their gloss on this use of the term 'Idumean':

> When John Hyrcanus I (nephew of Judas Maccabeus and the great-great grandfather of Mariam) conquered the kingdom of Idumea (or, in Hebrew, Edom) to the south of Judea, its inhabitants converted to Judaism to avoid exile, but the Jews regarded them as only 'half-Jews,' and Herod's Idumean origins made him an unpopular governor (and, accordingly, more dependent on the Romans, his patrons).[27]

Herod's lineage therefore places him in an ambiguous political position and forms the basis for much of the abuse levelled at him and his ex-wife, Doris. Mariam's mother, Alexandra, for example, rails against the reportedly deceased Herod and condemns the apparent ease with which he had been able to attain the Judean throne:

> Base Edomite, the damned Esau's heir!
> Must he ere Jacob's child the crown inherit?
> Must he, vile wretch, be set in David's chair?
> No, David's soul, within the bosom placed
> Of our forefather Abram, was ashamed
> To see his seat with such a toad disgraced –
> That seat that hath by Judah's race been famed. (1.2.6-12)

Alexandra therefore sees Herod's accession to the Judean throne as an effacement of the historical precedents and the values of Jewish culture and asserts that Herod has effectively usurped the throne from its rightful line. She goes on to condemn him as a 'fatal enemy to my royal blood' (1.2.13) and as one of 'Esau's issue, heir of hell' (1.2.22). Alexandra's rhetoric is followed by Mariam's assertions of the legitimacy of her children by Herod over those from his former marriage to Doris. She presents their sons as 'These boys that did descend from royal line' (1.2.60) before insisting that 'These did [Herod] style his heirs to David's throne; / My Alexander, if he live, shall sit / In the majestic seat of Solomon' (1.2.61-3).

[27] Weller and Ferguson, p. 152.

Again, Alexandra asserts that Mariam's father was of 'David's blood' (1.2.67). In this way David comes to represent a source of legitimacy for Judean political power and the basis for sovereign authority over the Jewish people. This point is also suggested by Constabarus' labelling of Palestine as 'David's city'. The repeated references to David suggest that Herod's accession to the throne of Judea, in spite of the ambiguous status with which he is presented, is not only defying his social status but is also, in the view of those claiming descent from Jacob, tarnishing the legacy of David.

David's claim to authority over the Jews is predicated upon his decisive victory over the Philistines, as emblematised by his defeat of Goliath. As well as casting him down with the slingshot, David also beheaded the giant with his own sword. The recurring references to David suggest that an act of beheading effectively frames the political power structure of Judea, a premise that Herod attempts to exploit as a means of re-establishing his political authority which has been compromised by his absence and the rumours of his death. Because of the odds stacked against him, David's victory over Goliath was often interpreted as an example of the power of divine providence, a point frequently emphasised in contemporary writing. In John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*, for example, Martin Luther is characterised as a David-like figure courageously fighting the over-bearing tyrannies of the forces of Roman Catholicism. Foxe argues that Luther has been working against the combined forces of the

> Pope, Cardinals and Church of Rome, which no King nor Emperour could ever do, yea durst never attempt, nor all the learned men before him could ever compasse. Which miraculous worke of God, I recount nothing inferiour to the miracle of David overthrowing great Goliath. Wherefore if miracles do make a Sainct (after the Popes definition) what lacketh in Martin Luther but age and tyme only to make him a Sainct?[28]

For Foxe, Luther's work against the influences of the Catholic Church is thus part of the same providential scheme in which David defeated Goliath. Similar rhetoric was often

[28] John Foxe, *Actes and Monuments of Matters Most Speciall and Memorable* (London: John Day, 1583), p. 864.

applied in English militant Protestant writing. In Fulke Greville's *Dedication to Sir Philip Sidney*, for example, the 'princelike resolution' of Elizabeth is praised and she is characterised as 'this she-David of ours [who] ventured to undertake the great Goliath among the Philistines abroad (I mean Spain and the Pope)'.[29] Similarly, in the dedication to his *Harmonie upon the first booke of Samuel*, Andrew Willet praised Prince Henry for the stand he was taking against the expansion of Catholic hegemony: just as David 'in his young yeres encountred with Goliath, slue him and cut off his head… So your Highnes the worthie example of our David the Kings sacred and Christian Maiestie, oppose your selfe, even in these your tender and springing yeares to that Goliath of Rome'.[30] As well as emphasising the providential nature of David's victory over Goliath, many commentators also placed emphasis upon the fact that Goliath was beheaded with his own sword. This recurring premise served not only to emphasise the role of providence in the defeat of Goliath, but also to highlight the fact that he is punished by his own vices. In his commentaries upon St Gregory, for example, Simon Birckbek would go on to assert that 'whereas Heretickes use to alleadge Scripture for themselves; Gregory saith, they may bee confuted by Scripture it selfe, even as Goliath was slaine with his owne sword'.[31] Although this source significantly post-dates Cary's play, it nevertheless evidences the scope to view this biblical episode in such a light. In his *Challenge Concerning the Catholic Church*, Matthew Sutcliffe also viewed the sword of Goliath which used so violently against its owner more ambiguously as a weapon with which 'a man with labour and diligence may cut off both his owne head, and the head of antichrist'.[32]

[29] Fulke Greville, *A Dedication to Sir Philip Sidney* in *The Prose Works of Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke*, ed. by John Gouws (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), pp. 3-136 (pp. 98-9).
[30] Andrew Willet, *An Harmonie upon the first booke of Samuel* (Cambridge: L. Greene, 1607), ¶2v.
[31] Simon Birckbek, *The Protestants Evidence Taken out of Good Records* (London: Robert Milbourne, 1635), p. 186.
[32] Matthew Sutcliffe, *A Challenge Concerning the Romish Church, Her Doctrine and Practises* (London: Arnold Hatfield, 1602), p. 135.

Although David is frequently evoked throughout Cary's play as an emblem of patriarchy, there are numerous complexities associated with these references. On the one hand, as Erin E. Kelly points out, David is part of the providential scheme into which Mariam's martyrdom is incorporated, along with the fall of the Maccabean dynasty, that culminates in the coming of Christ;[33] on the other, however, Alison Findlay characterises this 'patriarchal dynasty' and the 'numerous references to David's city' as being focused upon 'a lost, irrecoverable, and not altogether attractive homeland from which the characters have moved away'.[34] In spite of such patriarchal associations, though, the figure of David also had complex resonances. Michelle Osherow has highlighted the ways in which early modern commentators presented David in ambiguous, almost androgynous, terms. She points out that the account of David's battle against Goliath was one of the most frequently evoked of the Davidic narratives and that it provided female readers with an exemplary model through which they could 'look to inherit the strength and influence associated with this character. This strength is not an inherently masculine force, however, but one repeatedly linked to divine favor, thereby negating the significance of David's sex', a point compounded by the deployment of the often 'stereotypically feminine characteristics' in the biblical narrative of his victory over Goliath, in which his 'physical disadvantage against the giant Goliath is intended to put the future king on a par with feminine weakness'.[35] Osherow also goes on to note the frequent promulgation of David as a model of resistance, a position that is achieved, in part, through the feminization of David in biblical commentaries, drawn in particular from a scene in which Saul arms David (1 Samuel 17:38-9) that serves, in the Geneva Bible (which was to

[33] See Kelly, pp. 35-9.
[34] Findlay, *Playing Spaces*, p. 32.
[35] Michelle Osherow, *Biblical Women's Voices in Early Modern England* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 112-13 and 116. Osherow discusses how commentators frequently placed emphasis upon David's weakness 'and this vulnerability is a key element in early modern readings', as an example of divine favour; this would, in turn, be associated with Elizabeth as a means of highlighting that 'a woman may also possess an unrecognized potency' (p. 116).

become the prominent version of the Bible in English from its appearance in 1575 and into the next century)[36] to distance David from the traditional image of exemplary martial masculinity. In this way, the 'manly accoutrements prohibit David's movement and reinforce passivity' and 'the traditional habit of the solider makes David's weakness even more apparent', because he had not 'proved' himself sufficient to wear them (1 Samuel 17:39).[37] The providential nature of David's victory is therefore emphasised by the way in which he is distanced from the traditional image of masculine martial prowess. This, in turn, highlights the episode as a victory over the forces of overbearing and corrupt patriarchy.

The beheading of the tyrannical general Holofernes, after being drunkenly lured back to his tent by Judith, also afforded similar exemplary readings of resistance to such tyranny. Osherow argues that, in common with David, Judith 'defeats a giant others lack the confidence to confront'.[38] This biblical narrative also provided numerous opportunities for topical application as well as for broader allegorisation. Greville, again, imagines Elizabeth as 'our famous Judith' who has 'dispersed the terror of this Spanish Holofernes like a cloud full of wind'.[39] The resonance of Judith is also somewhat ambiguous. As well as representing exemplary female heroism, Judith also had the potential to be viewed as an example of female duplicity. She is, for example, catalogued amongst the various examples of *The Decyte of Women* in a 1557 tract in which the story of her seduction and murder of the inebriated Holofernes is summarised as an instance of

> how the great and mighty prynce, the whyche coulde not be ouercome wyth all their craft… was wonne through the louely wordes and deceyte of a woman, the whyche many a thousand men dyd repent, and lese theyr lyfe therfore, who is it that can take

[36] According to Hamlin, the prominence of the Geneva Bible could be attributed to a number of factors: firstly, it was published in portable editions, including the 'medium-sized quarto' first edition, followed by the 'more inexpensive octavo', both in contrast to the folio form in which Bibles had more commonly appeared; secondly, it became popular with 'the hotter sort of English Protestants, given its association with Calvin's Geneva and the evangelical zeal of some of its marginal notes'; and thirdly, it 'divided the biblical text into chapters and, for the first time in an English Bible, verses', making it 'the most user-friendly edition that had ever been published' (pp. 9-11).
[37] Osherow, p. 142.
[38] Ibid, p. 154.
[39] Greville, *A Dedication*, p. 127.

> hede of the deceyte of women, except he doo vtterly abstayne their company, for they be so false and so full of deceyte, that all the hede that a man can take is to lytle.[40]

This is therefore suggestive of a more ambivalent reputation than as a figure of exemplary female virtue.

As with the beheading of Goliath, the death of Holofernes was also notable for the fact that it was carried out with the victim's own sword, a premise that invited similar moral interpretations. These two instances of Biblical beheading are linked in *The Dumb Divine Speaker*, an Italian text by the Dominican prior, Giacomo Affinati, and translated into English in 1605, roughly when Cary may have been working on *Mariam*. This text consists of a dialogue between two brothers – one of them Claudio, bishop of Placentia, the other Lodovico, Marquis of Gibello – in which the virtues of silence are extolled. At one point in the dialogue, Claudio considers the words attributed to David in the Psalms:

> Why then me thinkes the Prophet David said wel, in speaking of this wicked tongue, and comparing it to a sword: *Et lingua eorum gladius acutus*. And, as oftentimes it happeneth, that a man (by mischance) hurts himselfe with his owne weapon: the like doe these men with their owne tongues, even confound themselves, and become woorthy of eternall horror. So that we may say of them, as of Saul, who was murthered by his own proper weapon: and David did cut off the head of Goliah, with his owne sword. The like dealt the chaste matron Judith with Holofernes, smit off his head with his owne weapon.[41]

In these cases the beheading becomes, for the interlocutors of the dialogue, a fitting punishment for the hypocrisy of the figures upon whom they comment. In this way, the deceitful and hypocritical tongue becomes the means of their downfalls – they are slain with their own weapons.

There are numerous instances throughout *The Tragedy of Mariam* in which the tongue is highlighted as the source of vice. In her opening soliloquy, Mariam associates Herod with malicious and tyrannical speech when she asks, 'Why joy I not the tongue no more shall

[40] Anon., *The deceyte of women, to the instruction and ensample of all men yonge and olde* (London, 1557), C4v.
[41] Giovanni Affinati, *The Dumbe Divine Speaker*, trans. by A.M. (London: William Leake, 1605), pp. 172-3.

speak / That yielded forth my brother's latest doom?' (1.1.39-40). Similarly, in her plotting against Mariam, Salome states 'Now, tongue of mine, with scandal load her name!' (3.2.65), thus locating the source of malicious actions once again in the tongue. Such references can be related, again, to Proverbs, which similarly highlights the potentially destructive properties of malicious speech by likening it to a weapon: 'There is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword: but the tongue of the wise is health' (Proverbs 12:18). Whereas many early modern commentaries upon the biblical beheadings had asserted that the fates of individuals like Goliath and Holofernes were fitting punishments for their vices, *Mariam* sees Herod attempt to subvert this logic in order to serve his own tyranny and to strengthen his political power. Whilst Herod's actions can be compared with those of one of his successors, Herod Antipater, who was persuaded into beheading John the Baptist by another figure identified by the name of Salome, his actions also harness the kinds of associations implied in the other biblical intertexts upon which the play draws. In an early scene, Herod's rule is linked to the control of wayward speech by Salome who responds to one of Alexandra's tirades by asserting that 'You durst not thus have given your tongue the rein / If noble Herod still remained in life' (1.3.13-14). Mariam's downfall and her eventual beheading are also associated with her apparent outspokenness. This view is suggested by Sohemus' assertion that 'Unbridled speech is Mariam's worst disgrace / And will endanger her without desert' (3.3.64-5). The Chorus, representing the populace of Judea, have also internalised the view of the transgressive nature of Mariam's propensity for public speech, effectively equating it with adultery:

> That wife her hand against her fame doth rear
> That more than to her lord alone will give
> A private word to any second ear,
> And, though she may with reputation live,
> Yet though most chaste, she doth her glory blot
> And wounds her honour, though she kills it not. (3.Chor.13-18)

Salome exploits this kind of reasoning in her efforts to discredit Mariam in Herod's view. In response to Herod's comment upon Mariam's 'world-amazing wit' (4.7.72), Salome asserts that:

> She speaks a beauteous language, but within
> Her heart is false as powder; and her tongue
> Doth but allure the auditors to sin
> And is the instrument to do you wrong. (4.7.73-6)

Herod is finally persuaded by this viewpoint and concludes that 'She's unchaste; / Her mouth will ope to every stranger's ear' (4.7.77-8), thus following the logic that outspokenness can be equated with compromised chastity. Herod therefore deploys a similar logic to that in Affinati's view that the beheadings of Goliath and Holofernes are the results of their own vices, particularly their propensities for malicious or disordered speech. Herod's beheading of Mariam therefore sees him conflate punishment with a moral verdict upon Mariam's apparently compromised chastity. The association between women's speech and disorder is also related to images of monstrosity through Constabarus's references to Salome. He asserts that Salome's 'mouth, though serpent-like it never hisses, / Yet, like a serpent, poisons where it kisses' (2.4.49-50). Constabarus's assertions about Salome are therefore further reflective of cultural associations between speech, sexuality, and sin.

The trope of headlessness also relates to ideas of disorder. The association between headlessness and mobilised political unrest was a trope frequently evoked during the early modern period.[42] However, a precedent for the specific links established in this play between biblical narratives, dynastic crises, and female disorder comes in the form of the *Epigrams* of Sir John Harington, a series of poems that survive in manuscript. These links are outlined in

[42] The trope of the public as both the 'headless' and 'many-headed' multitude is the subject of an influential analysis by Christopher Hill in *Continuity and Change in Seventeenth Century England* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1974), pp. 181-204. For further comment on early modern views on the prospect of popular uprising, see also Annabel Patterson, *Shakespeare and the Popular Voice* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1989), pp. 32-51.

what Gerard Kilroy describes as 'One of the most powerful political sequences' in the poems, running between III.38-44.[43] Kilroy explains that during this sequence,

> an apparently innocent debacle on King David's adultery (III.40) is set within a group of epigrams that, endlessly playing on the word 'head' and 'woman' suggests contemporary parallels. Henry VIII desired both the 'body' and 'head' of his wives and the Queen is as much 'a headles woman' as the Queen of Scots she had executed.[44]

In his epigram 'Of Monsters', Harington goes on to catalogue a variety of monstrous figures, including Janus, Cerberus, and Hydra, before concluding that 'of all theis, if you can rightly conster / a headles woman is a greater monster' (42.17-18). In this case 'headlessness' is equated with a failure to adhere to the rule of a husband. As Jason Scott-Warren notes, this poem contains explicit comment 'about the need for women to be ruled, in the domestic sphere and in the political nation'.[45] Significantly, this epigram occurs just after the verse addressed 'To King David', which laments that his affair with Bathsheba represents a significant blemish upon his otherwise exemplary character. Both poems also appear in the same sequence as one on the subject 'Of king Henry the 8. his woing', which, as Kilroy argues, 'suggests how quickly beheading follows bedding and… links Henry's adultery and executions with King David's weakness of the flesh'.[46] This provides a parallel with the ways in which Cary's play reveals the politicisation of beheading, especially when linked with sexuality. The play, in particular, alludes to the biblical authorisation of the patriarchal conception of the husband as the 'head' ruling over the wife; an example of this is Constabarus's reference to Proverbs, usually attributed to Solomon, and his assertion that 'Our wisest prince did say, and true he said: / "A virtuous woman crowns her husband's head"' (1.6.21-2). Similar rhetoric appears in 1 Corinthians, in which it is stated that 'the

[43] Gerard Kilroy, 'Introduction' in *The Epigrams of Sir John Harington*, ed. by Gerard Kilroy (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 1-90 (p. 55).
[44] Ibid, p. 45.
[45] Jason Scott-Warren, *Sir John Harington and the Book as Gift* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 142.
[46] Kilroy, p. 55.

head of the woman is the man' (1 Corinthians 11:3). The acquiescence of the wife, in Constabarus's view, comes to emblematise the stability of patriarchal authority, an emblem that is represented, again, by the head.

Herod's absence and the resultant rumours of his death have caused considerable instability in his kingdom. In spite of his subsequent regrets, his sanctioning of the execution of Mariam becomes a means for him to re-stabilise his state and re-assert his authority. Even before his absence, though, he had struggled to retain his political power as a result of his status as an Edomite and his resultant exclusion from the political centre of Judea. In order to overcome his cultural marginalisation and to re-establish his political power, Herod does not carry out his rhetorical plan to bribe Mariam by robbing 'the holy David's sepulchre'; he instead attempts to emulate David by making use of the spectacle of beheading in order to re-establish his state. Similarly, he tries to invert the resonances of Judith's beheading of Holofernes by sending the chaste Mariam to the scaffold in order to strengthen his tyrannical hold on his kingdom. In this way, Herod's deployment of the public execution is in line with the 'juridico-political function' of the state execution observed by Michel Foucault, according to whom:

> It is a ceremonial by which a momentarily injured sovereignty is reconstituted… Its aim is not so much to re-establish a balance as to bring into play, at its extreme point, the dissymmetry between the subject who has dared to violate the law and the all-powerful sovereign who displays his strength.[47]

Herod's execution of Mariam is designed to re-establish Herod's authority and neutralise the various oppositional forces which has absence had unleashed. However, as we shall see, the providential and proto-Christian qualities attached to Mariam's death, and the stark exposure of Herod's tyranny, mean that this endeavour is doomed to fail.

* * *

[47] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (1977; repr., London: Penguin Books, 1991), pp. 48-9.

As highlighted previously, one of the most notable biblical intertexts that resonate with Mariam's execution is the death of John the Baptist as narrated in the Gospels of Matthew, Luke, and, most extensively, in Mark. In the introduction to their edition of the play, Weller and Ferguson highlight the significance of the story of John's death in Reformation England. As they note, the execution of John and his refusal to retract his outspoken views on the marriage between Herod Antipater and Herodias 'would have been of particular interest to writers struggling with conflicts between their sense of political duty and their own religious beliefs, especially if those beliefs inclined to Catholicism'.[48] John the Baptist had also figured prominently in mystery play cycles as well as the tradition of academic drama emerging in the mid-to-late-sixteenth century, a notable example of which was George Buchanan's *Baptistes* (published 1577, but probably written in the early 1540s).[49] According to Weller and Ferguson, these traditions 'focus on Herod's career as an allegorically rich story of pagan tyranny attacking Christian innocence' and share 'a tendency to conflate the three main historical Herods [Herod the Great, Herod Antipas, and his brother Herod II] into a single wicked figure'.[50] Whilst there are some striking narrative similarities between the events in Cary's play and the death of John the Baptist, the biblical account also invites numerous thematic and generic parallels. Jeff Jay, for example, has emphasised how Mark's account draws upon features of the tragic genre, particularly the ways in which 'Stage-craft and spectacle… form a significant aspect of John's story, and this is in keeping with other narratives that are tragic in mode, which often elicit a "stagey" atmosphere', as well as noting 'the provocative theatrical elements such as the dance and the head'.[51] Jay also notes that the performative elements harnessed in the representation of Herod's court emphasise the decadent and tyrannical nature of this space, potentially contributing to 'a harsh critique of

[48] Weller and Ferguson, p. 30.
[49] Ibid, p. 33.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Jeff Jay, *The Tragic in Mark: A Literary-Historical Interpretation* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck), p. 209.

Herodias, Herod, the Agrippas, the Herodian family, and the members of their court for having succumbed to the lowest depths of infamy in their promotion of and delight in the performance of a noble girl'.[52] Such elements are notable when considered alongside Herod's comments upon his return from Rome in Cary's play and his rhetorical address to the city:

> I all your Roman beauties have beheld,
> And seen the shows your aediles did prepare;
> I saw the sum of what in you excelled,
> Yet saw no miracle like Mariam rare (4.1.25-8).

In his immersion in Roman spectacle and his sexual obsession for Mariam, Herod exhibits similar signs of 'imperial' tyranny and decadence to those noted in Jay's reading of Mark. Jay's analysis also highlights the structural and narrative significance of this episode in Mark's Gospel, particularly how the 'execution and arrest of John become ciphers for the execution and arrest of Jesus' and how the 'generally tragic portrayal of John's story… foreshadows what is in store for Jesus, whose life, particularly during the passion, will likewise be portrayed tragically'.[53] This foreshadowing effect serves to present John as a proto-Christian martyr, whose death resonates closely with the passion of Jesus. It is this final element that provides the closest resonances with the fate of Mariam in Cary's play.

Although he attempts to harness the power of the public beheading to strengthen his authority, Herod also sees its potential limitations, especially when related to the apparently divine and miraculous properties of Mariam. When Salome first suggests the prospect of executing Mariam by beheading, this prompts a series of rhetorical objections from Herod, based upon Mariam's divine qualities:

> Think you that swords are miracles like you?
> Her skin will very curtal-ax edge refell,
> And then your enterprise you well may rue.
> What if the fierce Arabian notice take
> Of this your wretched weaponless estate?
> They answer, when we bid resistance make,

[52] Ibid, p. 222.
[53] Ibid, p. 229.

That Mariam's skin their falchions did rebate.
Beware of this! You make a goodly hand
If you of weapons do deprive your land. (4.7.6-14)

In this way, he suggests (quite prophetically as it transpires) that Mariam's beheading will inflict more harm than good upon his authority, proving as it does to be the route towards her proto-Christian martyrdom. Mariam's execution is not represented directly in Cary's play, but is instead related in an account delivered to Herod by the Nuntio, who begins by describing the scene of Mariam's execution:

I went amongst the curious gazing troop
To see the last of her that was the best,
To see if death had heart to make her stoop,
To see the sun-admiring phoenix nest (5.1.21-4).

As well as using the symbol of the phoenix nest to foreground the motif of resurrection, the Nuntio's account evokes further resonances of Christ's passion – including a reference to the three days following her death, the representation of the composure of the protagonist, and an account of the suicide by hanging of the treacherous butler who betrayed Mariam – all of which contribute to what Beilin argues is 'an allegory of the Crucifixion, for she foreshadows redemption from the old law, typified by Herod's kingdom'.[54] Frances Dolan also emphasises the importance of the fact that Cary presents Mariam's death off-stage, thereby employing a device which 'suppresses bodily death as part of the program for transforming the female protagonist into a near-saint'.[55] Mariam's death by beheading therefore serves a similar purpose to that of John, in its foreshadowing effects and providential resonances.

In her presentation of beheading in this play, Cary places considerable strain upon the representative properties of this mode of state punishment. She does so by positioning it in tension with competing resonances of the motif of beheading and headlessness; although they have associations with the reassertion of political authority and as an emblem of specifically

[54] Beilin, p. 171.
[55] Dolan, 163.

female disorder, I have shown that the location and society in which Cary's play takes place invites comparisons with the Old Testament representations of beheading as a heroic act of subversion against corrupt, overbearing, and ungodly forms of patriarchal power, as well as underlining the qualities of providence and proto-Christian martyrdom associated with the death of John the Baptist. These elements of intertextuality, and the provocative and anti-tyrannical resonances of the episodes in question, serve to complicate and undermine Herod's appropriation of beheading as a means of re-establishing his power, as well as forming a critique of contemporary deployments of the trope of headlessness. As we have already seen, Ramona Wray has identified a range of biblical allusions contained within Cary's play; as this reading highlights, attending in detail to such allusions and associations has the potential to open up new readings and uncover hitherto unnoticed aspects of the play's political and topical commentary.