

Reinstating Oscar Wilde within the Literary Canon of Post Modernity: Re-visioning *Salome*.

By

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Abstract

Oscar Wilde has always been a paradigm of opposites and contradictoriness and far beyond his literary age as far as his narratology goes. Drawing reflective sustenance from Pater and Ruskin, he moved much beyond the Victorian *aesthetics* into the *fractured dichotomies* of post-modernist *functionalities* and *inter-textualities*. Be it his first volume of poems (1881) or his first play *Salome* (1883) or the fairy tales (1888) or his only novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* he showed a predilection for varied forms and structures disregarding the usual determinants of *generic affiliation*.

In *Salome* (1893) Wilde chose to exploit a Biblical legend without dwelling on the Christian nuances and connotations and instills into the story of avant-garde and a social view point typical of his own bohemian lifestyle recasting and revisioning the pristine tale into a modernist exposition of repressed psychological desires.

The paper proposes to analyze the *verbal arabesques* of *Salome's* speeches to investigate her inexorable capacity to fly into *surrealistic distortions* evincing her own fractured selfhood verging on the mythically *demonic*, transcending the *spatio-temporality* of human circumstances, creating an *exclusivity* of being and becoming.

Keywords

Aesthetics, fractured dichotomies, functionalities, inter-textualities, generic affiliation. verbal arabesques, surrealistic distortions, demonic, spatio-temporality, exclusivity

Introduction

“I will be a poet, a writer, a dramatist. Somehow or other I will be famous, and if not famous, I will be notorious”

So declared the exotic Irishman – Oscar Wilde – as he set foot in England in search of creative freedom and artistic opportunities that strife-ridden Ireland had denied. This wittiest of humorists and the most humorous of wits was an eclectic personality, oscillating between an unpalatable superficiality and an uncanny profundity in such quick succession that it was well-nigh impossible to pin him down. Perhaps he had inherited these dire contrasts from his parents who were antithetically opposed to one another and yet inseparably attached and it was living within such contrariety that he was fascinated by both Ruskin and Pater. Whereas Pater fired Wilde’s imagination, Ruskin stirred his conscience; Pater appealed to the instinct of individualism in him and Ruskin awakened in him a sense of social awareness and responsibility; the former instilled in Wilde the ideal of self-enhancement and self-perfection and the latter inspired him to devote his time and energy for the common good. Thus, Wilde could run riot and savor a life of sensual indulgence as well as practice scholarly restraint and self-discipline – his soul and body titillated by Pater he look to Ruskin for spiritual guidance.

It is these vying dichotomies in his nature that make his works fit for a post-modernist narratological analysis. A non-conformist, to say the least, he could not be tied down to the rigors of conventionality and generic prescriptions moving dexterously out of the labyrinths of the stereotypical – he was a law

unto himself. His uninhibited creativity came in for much critical censure with the publication of his *Poems* (1881). However, rejection failed to plummet Wilde's enthusiasm or inhibit his imaginativeness. He wrote some fairy tales in 1888 giving vent to his diversified fancies. These were favorably reviewed and spurred him to try his hand at fiction – *The Picture of Dorian Gray* where he tried his hand at the highly sensitive, provocative and controversial arena of Victorian morality.

Thereafter, the plays followed in quick succession – *Vera*, *The Duchess of Padua*, *The Importance of Being Earnest* and *Lady Windermere's Fan* to name the more popular.

For a complex personality like Wilde's that carried an entire spectrum of prismatic experiences and responses within itself, and who was regarded as a blatant iconoclast who propagated an anti-establishment creed of his own making, no other platform but theatre could have been appropriate. No wonder that Wilde was fascinated with theatre from the days of his youth. His old school friend, Edward Sullivan relates that "when they met, Oscar used to be full of his occasional visits to London and could talk of nothing but the impact made upon him by plays and players." Wilde attempted to satisfy his protean tendencies and fertile imagination through his plays. Theatre was the medium through which he satiated his sensual and sensitive temperament. It was a platform where art existed and was enjoyed for Wilde for its own sake; where the boundaries between the moral and the immoral ceased to exist and what remained was the enjoyment of art in its pristine glory and variety. Simultaneously, theatre was crucial to Wilde's social 'self', enabling him to reach to a wider audience. Wilde the man, Wilde the playwright, Wilde the rebel aimed at being a prototype or icon of a modern attitude that sets itself out in belligerent defiance and denial of all things normal or stereotyped. He questions and puts to test, through his wry and acidic comments, the overt cruelty and insensitivity abounding in a Victorian psyche which otherwise

depicts such blasé morality. He exposes the subtle shades of insanity, abnormality, and excess of human behavior garbed in the sanctimonious colours of morality. He attempts in his plays to reveal the antithetical patterns of society – frivolity against decorum; irreverence against acceptance; anarchy against institutionalism; the individual against society; beauty against ugliness; freedom against bondage.

Salome, published in 1893 was originally written in French and later translated into English by Alfred Douglas. It faced immense official censorship and critical disapproval from the public for reasons that ranged from offending the religious sentiments of the people to jeopardizing moral issues. The play was regarded by some as an effrontery to the social order and a threat to its stability while others considered it “repulsive and very offensive.” (The Times 1996, 414) Nevertheless, the play, despite all opposition and criticism was staged in 1896 when Wilde was in prison facing charges of homosexuality. This production restored Wilde’s questionable self-esteem when he boldly declared that at “a time of disgrace and shame I should still be regarded as an artist.” (Pearson 1954, 321)

Wilde chose to step out of the middle-class drawing rooms of his social comedies and embark upon a new genre of writing that exploited the Biblical legend of Salome. The legend of Salome has its origin in the Gospel narratives of St. Matthew (xiv, 3-16) and St. Mark (vi, 17-22). The legend describes Salome as a bizarre adolescent, the daughter of Herodias and stepdaughter of Herod, the ruler of Galilee during Biblical times. Herod had held John, the Baptist captive during a grand celebration. He asked Salome to perform a dance in return of which he promised to grant her anything she wished. Herodias, Salome’s mother instigated Salome to dance and then forced her to demand John’s head. Herodias thus avenged herself on John for hurling insults at her for her incestuous marriage with Herod. Since Herod was a ruler, he had to abide by

the oath given to Salome to fulfill any wish she put forth. Thus when Salome asked for John's head, Herod had to yield to her demand.

However, Wilde picks up only the story of Salome and the basic incidents of the legend without going into the Biblical nuances and connotations. He uses the legend as the foundation of his play, *Salome* and builds his imagination upon it which is devoid of any biblical coloring, but more so projects his own artistic perception and vision of the legend. In his aim to establish an avant-garde and asocial stand that was typical of his bohemian mannerism, Wilde recasts a Christian viewpoint as much as he revises the society at large. Traditionally, the Christian society debased women "by giving sexuality the connotation of something sinful and low," (Horney 1939, 117) but Wilde, in his play, *Salome*, makes his heroine the representative of a sexual condition. The dominant characteristic that he attributes to Salome is the outrageous expression of her sexual instincts and desires. Wilde opposes the religious, social and cultural reasons that enforce upon woman the realization of being debased and soiled by sexuality and thus lowered (lower) in her own self-esteem. In doing so, he reverts to the process of understanding the subject of sexuality.

Analysis of Salome's Verbal Speeches

The play, *Salome* is an exposition of Salome's acceptance and expression of sexuality, and the multiplicity of images that she acquires as a consequence. Her passion for the prophet Jokanaan is the epicenter on which all the tendencies and causes are based. Wilde makes this passion the pivotal incident that defines and shapes Salome's entire personality. Her character assumes multiple dimensions as she moves from one emotional or sexual experience to another. She binds together the numerous strands of libidinous association inviting multiple layers of interpretation and exploration.

Salome's passion for Jokanaan and her own psychological being has been variously interpreted by critics. One view is given by Michael Kennedy in his

book *Richard Strauss* (1995) in which he observes that Salome's is "a study in obsession." (134) Salome's obsessive passion for Jokanaan makes its pronounced impact in a stretch of three powerful speeches. Each speech demonstrates the ever increasing intensity of her irresistible desire for Jokanaan. Wilde's critic, Epifanio San Jaun, Jr. (1967), calls the three speeches as "metaphoric flights" that "represent the release of her libidinal impulses." (12

Addressed to Jokanaan, the first of the three speeches elicits Salome's obsessive passion directed towards a physical appreciation of his body. Salome describes Jokanaan's body in a variety of images. The pristine purity and whiteness of his body is evoked through very powerful correlatives: one, "the lilies of a field that the mower hath never mowed," (CW, 558) and the other, "the snows that lie on the mountains." (CW, 559) The fairness and the very whiteness of his skin is enhanced by the exotic and luxuriant comparison to the roses in the garden of the Queen of Arabia and to the moon. A very strong visual sensuousness is aroused signifying, on the one hand, an extreme sensuousness of the roses, and on the other, the unapproachable purity of the moon. This first love speech of Salome uses imagery that is "pure" and "chaste." (Shewan, 1977, 140) Salome describes at length the attraction she feels towards Jokanaan's hair. She draws a close parallel between Jokanaan's hair and "the clusters of black grapes that hang from the vine trees of Edom in the land of the Edomites." (CW, 559) The imagery of black grapes evokes sensuousness and intoxication. The image of the fluid movement or the cascading down of his hair is also evoked by its comparison to grapes. Salome uses the image of "the great cedars of Lebanon" that provide shade to the lions and the robbers to stress the black color of Jokanaan's hair. Emphasizing on the very blackness of his hair, she compares it to the starless, moonless "long, black nights" whose very blackness is like an inscrutable curtain shielding out any possible ray of light; in other words, Jokanaan's youthfulness is portrayed through the vivid imagery of the cedars and starless, moonless night. The third

love speech of Salome grows more intense in its imagery. There is wild profusion and riot of color in the most exotic, oriental and mystic blends and comparisons used by Salome to describe Jokanaan's red mouth. The deep red color of his mouth is created through a vibrant visual comparison with the "pomegranate-flowers that blossom in the garden of Tyre." (559) She raves about the sensuous rich red color through the images of red roses and "the red blasts of trumpets that herald the approach of kings, and make afraid the enemy." Not even for a moment does the sensual or erotic impulse wane or dilute as Salome speaks of Jokanaan's mouth surpassing the red color of the feet of those who crush grapes in the wine-press. The element of raw and bestial sensuousness is brought to the fore when the comparisons of Jokanaan's red mouth is made with the feet of those who return from a forest after killing a lion and tiger. The variations extend to Salome's comparing Jokanaan's mouth to a "branch of coral" that fishermen have found in the sea's twilight and to "the bow of the King of the Persians" that has been painted with vermillion and tipped with coral. In fact, the quintessential color is red – a color that depicts the innate passion and life in its prime form and extends to reveal yet many more shades and hues – ranging from the red of the rose, to the red of bestial blood, to the red of sanctified vermillion and to the red of exclusive coral. The intensity of Salome's passion reaches a peak where she is able to break free of any religion or culture and presents herself in the most primordial state – like a pagan worshipping a God. Overwhelming passion, unclouded passion, uncontrollable passion is what is predominantly demonstrated in the last speech of Salome.

The Salome's verbal arabesques multiply by the time she delivers her third speech, yet her inexorable capacity to imagine never succumbs to surrealistic distortions. Each and every image that Salome uses clearly and vividly depicts the intense passion that she feels for Jokanaan. Yet the multiplicity as well as repeated occurrence of these images points towards the

obsessive nature of Salome's love for Jokanaan. Salome's singular obsession for Jokanaan excludes any other possibility or avenue of thought. She is transfixed to and entranced by Jokanaan's body and continuously emphasizes its beauty through a series of vivid images. Her obsessive passion is so intense that it even overcomes the curses and humiliations of Jokanaan or his threats of an impending doom. Salome obsessively pursues the object of her desire remaining undeterred by any moral, social or religious norm.

This contention of obsessive passion is countered by yet another view. Salome's capacity for passion for Jokanaan and its uninhibited expression has been described by Joseph Donohue. (2005) as "perverse" (126) . In the light of a Freudian view, Salome's passion for Jokanaan can be critically examined as an instance of perversion which is demonstrated clearly in the three very powerful, seductive speeches of Salome. In the first speech, Salome speaks of her desire to touch Jokanaan's body. When she denied her wish, she requests Jokanaan to allow him to touch his hair. Yet again she faces rejection by Jokanaan. As such, she expresses her desire to kiss her mouth. She even manifests a strong attraction towards Jokanaan's voice which, she says, has an intoxicating effect of "wine" (CW, 558) on him. Thus Salome's passionate indulgence for Jokanaan swings from his body to his hair, to his mouth and even to his voice. Since the hair, mouth and voice are not specifically related to any sexual union, yet they form an important point of Salome's love. It can be seen that Salome's passion for Jokanaan moves in the direction of perversion.

The way she maintains a steady gaze at him, closely observing his eyes, white skin, black hair and red mouth is a clear illustration of this fixation as conceptualized by Freud. Since her amorous advances are repeatedly spurned by Jokanaan, Salome supplants the sexual aim with the activity of greedily looking at him. Salome's compulsive attraction towards Jokanaan's white skin, hair, mouth and voice is fetishistic in nature. Salome's fetishistic passion not

only substitutes Jokanaan's whole person with his skin, hair, mouth and voice but it also restricts itself completely to these aspects of Jokanaan.

Salome's compelling desire to kiss Jokanaan's mouth further corroborates Freud's concept of perversion. Salome becomes infatuated with Jokanaan's red mouth and persistently expresses her wish to kiss it. Though she continuously faces rejection by Jokanaan, yet she remains undaunted. Her request to Jokanaan: "Let me kiss thy mouth," alternates with her assertion: "I will kiss thy mouth, Jokanaan." Salome escalates her advances towards Jokanaan and is labeled a "wanton" and a "harlot" by him. However, she exploits Herod's love for her in order to satisfy her desire to kiss Jokanaan's mouth. By granting Herod's demand for a dance, she obtains the decapitated head of Jokanaan. Salome finally kisses the latter's mouth and "feasts lustfully on her victim's blood-soaked severed head." (574)

Yet another dimension is added to Salome's obsessive passion by the authors Christopher S. Nassaar and Nataly Shaheen (1995) who associate Salome with "mythic demonic creatures" (132) "the vampire, the siren, and the werewolf." (132) The image of a vampire is associated with Salome at the very outset of the play. She is described by the page of Herodias as "a dead woman," (552) who is "rising from a tomb." (552) The page compares Salome to a vampire who has died but has risen again in order to satiate her thirst for human blood. Salome had chosen Jokanaan to quench this thirst and exhibited her desire to obtain his love. But since she is repeatedly repelled and cursed by Jokanaan, she commits the "savage sex murder" (Nassaar, 219) of Jokanaan. The vampiric association becomes stronger as Salome holds the decapitated head of Jokanaan in her hand and kisses it passionately. In her ability to lure and cause destruction of the two male characters of the play viz. the Young Syrian and Herod, Salome evokes the image of a siren. Like a siren of Greek mythology who attracts unwary sailors on to rocks, Salome is a dangerously fascinating woman who captivates the likes of the Young Syrian and Herod.

Through her feminine wiles, she hypnotizes the Young Syrian to the extent where he becomes a slave to her wishes. He is so bewitched by Salome that he ignores the warnings of his friend, the Page of Herodias and continues to stare Salome continuously. The Young Syrian is not deterred even by his own awareness that his position in Salome's stepfather's palace is that of a slave. Being a mere slave, he must not enter into any emotional bond with Salome. Salome, in turn, is able to seduce the Young Syrian in such a manner that he concedes to her demand to bring Jokanaan out of the cistern, risking the wrath of Herod. However, despite all his efforts to win Salome's love, he is unable to do so. Displaying her capacity as the mythological siren, Salome heartlessly rejects the Syrian's affection. The Young Syrian finds it impossible to release himself from the spell that Salome has cast upon him and eventually kills himself.

Soon after the Young Syrian's death, it is Herod, Salome's stepfather who falls prey to the inescapable attractions of Salome. His fascination with Salome results in his complete physical as well as mental transfixation. He fails to take his eyes off Salome's seductive physical charm and beauty even for a moment. He articulates his sensual desire through his continuous gaze. Herod persistently asks Salome to enjoy a cup of wine or "eat fruit" (562) with him. But all his requests are turned down by Salome. Soon after Herod tells Salome that if she performs a dance for him, he would invest her with his own royal prerogatives, promising her to grant her any wish.

The demand for a dance by Herod marks the beginning of his mental annihilation. Richard Strauss has called Herod's character as a study in "pathological weakness" which takes place primarily due to the mesmerizing effect of the siren – Salome. The spell cast upon him by Salome proves fatal for Herod as he begins to lose his capacity to think or imagine. Soon after requesting Salome to dance, Herod confesses his mental agony. He is filled with a deep sense of despair that he begins to visualize "stains of blood" as "lovely as

rose petals.” His mental anguish and derangement is manifested in the hallucinations and a sense of impending doom he suffers from. He begins to perceive a certain “terrible” (571) quality in the breath of the bird’s wings. He is unable to feel the wind finding it cold, at one moment, and then hot, at the other. Herod speaks of her physical discomfort by feeling asphyxiated, and thus asks to loosen his mantle. He desperately begs to pour water on his hands and to give him snow to eat in order to relieve himself of physical pain. Herod’s asking for water on his hands and snow to eat signify the sensation of heat that he feels.

Herod’s mental and emotional annihilation culminates with Salome’s request for Jokanaan’s decapitated head in return for her dance. It is now when Salome asks for Jokanaan’s head that Herod realizes the trap into which he has fallen due to Salome’s beguiling ways. At this point, Herod realizes that keeping the oath that he had given to Salome to give her anything she asks for in return of her dance as well as not keeping this promise would incur shame upon him. If he is unable to keep his oath, it would undervalue his position as a trustworthy ruler. But at the same time, keeping his word too poses a grave problem for him where he would be required to kill a “holy” man like Jokanaan and invite divine punishment. Since Herod had to keep his promise made to Salome, he orders to kill Jokanaan. In doing so, he has abdicated his authority as he frustratingly utters: “Hereafter let no king swear as oath.” (573) He laments that he should never have given an oath to Salome. The oath has resulted in his emotional and mental captivity and death which he puts thus – “if they (kings) keep it (oath) not, it is terrible, and if they (kings) keep it (oath), it is terrible also.” (573) Salome’s fatal influence in the manner of a siren, thus, has a devastating effect on Herod that verges on his mental and emotional annihilation.

Another mythological association that Nassaar and Nataly have drawn in Wilde’s depiction of Salome is that of a werewolf.” (133) As the play moves ahead, Salome’s image goes through a gradual transfiguration from a human

being to a wolf. At the outset of the play, Salome is referred to as “a dove that has strayed,” (CW, 555) “a narcissus trembling in wind,” and “a silver flower.” These comparisons to a dove and a flower establish the human and innocent nature of Salome. She assumes a sylphlike quality through these parallels that suggest tenderness and beauty. She resembles a slender and graceful woman who attracts the likes of the Young Syrian and Herod with her irresistible charm. However, with the appearance of Jokanaan on the scene, Salome’s image of an innocent, beautiful woman begins to change. During this process of transformation, Salome first acquires the image of a seductress who captivates and entraps her own stepfather with her sensual, erotic dance. She attempts to enrapture Jokanaan too but all her efforts to do so prove futile, and she is labeled as the “daughter of adultery” (CW, 560) by Jokanaan. The final transformation of Salome from the “demonic role of seductress” to a beast takes place at the end of her dance. She announces her bestiality with her demand of the decapitated head of Jokanaan. By now, her erotic cravings have changed and become bestial in nature. Her desire to obtain Jokanaan has become so intense that it verges on animality. At this stage, she justifies Gustav Moreau’s image of her as “a monstrous Beast.” (Goodall 2002, 206)

There is yet another unexplored dimension of Salome --- that of ‘manic-depression’. Salome manifests the bipolar disorder, also known as manic-depressive illness that causes “unusual shifts” (www.nimb.hihgov...) in her mood, energy, and ability to function.” During the entire course of the play, Salome experiences dramatic mood swings – from euphoric to/and irritable to sad and hopeless and back again, often with a phase of normal mood in between. With these mood fluctuations, her energy and behavior also shows marked changes. These oscillations that Salome goes through are the episodes of mania and depression that alternate with each other in the following manner.

As Salome enters the stage, she is in a highly irritable mood. She expresses her disgust at being continuously stared by Herod. She finds it an

utterly incomprehensible gesture on Herod's part that though he is her stepfather, yet he should throw such amorous glances at her. Her irritable mood is further fuelled by the Jews who were "tearing each other in pieces over their foolish ceremonies," while barbarians indulged themselves in reckless drinking. She finds Greeks from Smyrna with "painted eyes and painted cheeks and frizzed hair" and Egyptians with "long nails of jade and russet cloaks" repulsive. Salome's irritability is escalated due to the "uncouth jargon" of Romans whom she finds rough and detestable. But soon she extricates herself from the suffocating company of the Jews, Romans, Greeks, Barbarians and Egyptians, and comes out into the open. The "sweet" air changes her mood and she becomes euphoric. In this ecstasy, Salome looks at the moon and admires it profusely. The sight of the moon triggers her thought processes and she compares it to a number of objects, jumping from one idea to another. At one moment, she calls moon "a little piece of money," and at other moment, "a little silver flower." Soon she personifies the moon and addresses it as a virgin who is "cold and chaste." All the three comparisons highlight varied aspects of moon that are entirely opposite to each other. This "wild flight of ideas" (Coleman, 325) in Salome is an important component of her manic phase.

This manic episode soon turns into depression as Salome hears the enchanting voice of Jokanaan from the cistern. She is terrified by the all-enveloping and engulfing blackness of the cistern. Her anxiety is revealed in her exclamation that "it must be terrible to be in so black a pit!" The utter blackness of the cistern transports Salome to a state of depression where she is reminded of nothing but death. She equates the black, claustrophobic and fear-inspiring darkness of the pit to a tomb, and thus, conveys her feelings of overwhelming depression and anxiety. Salome reiterates her demand to the soldiers to bring Jokanaan out of the pit and her mood of sadness now turns into anger. Anger, that is another depressive reaction gets the better of Salome as she shouts at the soldiers for keeping her waiting and showing reluctance in obeying her

commands. Salome feels “dejected” (Coleman 329) and is overcome by depressive feeling of helplessness. In this state, she goes up to the Young Syrian and requests him to concede to her desire to bring Jokanaan out of the cistern. Salome does not reveal her feelings of helplessness or despair and camouflages it under the cover of her clever talk. She attempts to persuade the Young Syrian by challenging him. She says that though Herod is afraid of the prophet, she does not expect the same cowardice in the Young Syrian. The Young Syrian does not relent and refuses to listen to Salome. Salome, who is inwardly going through the depressive feeling of helplessness, manages to conceal it and once again attempts to win over the young Syrian. Then she exploits the Young Syrian’s affection for her and raises his hopes of positive reciprocation of his feelings by promising him to look at him through her muslin veil. Thus, Salome manages to persuade the Young Syrian to bring Jokanaan out of the pit despite being aware of the Syrian’s risk in doing so. Salome’s indifference to all dangers or risks that is involved in bringing Jokanaan out of the cistern demonstrates a depressive phase that she is going through.

From being anxious, sad, angry and helpless, Salome now reverts to her earlier manic state of euphoria. As soon as she looks at Jokanaan, she becomes a hypo manic – “a very artistic state” of manic-depression “where there is a flight of ideas” (<http://en.wikipedia.org.....>) and is instantly taken in by him. Salome attributes to Jokanaan’s voice the intoxication of wine that has left her in a state of delirium. His voice has completely overtaken her and her senses. Thus, Salome’s racing mind can be traced with her abundant descriptions of Jokanaan’s eyes, skin, hair, mouth and voice. In this state of mania, Salome also shows “a complete abandonment of moral restraint.” (Coleman 325) Her talk becomes obscene as she makes sexual advances towards Jokanaan. Though she is aware of the religious standing of Jokanaan, yet she explicitly speaks of her amorous feelings towards him. Her irresistible attraction towards Jokanaan becomes apparent in her love speeches that she addresses to him.

However, all such sexual advances of Salome are resisted by Jokanaan and her mood again swings, even Herod's love cannot gladden her. But Salome who is undergoing a depressive phase refuses to reciprocate Herod's sexual advances. Her conversation with Herod is "carried on in a monotone and questions are answered with a meager supply of words." (Coleman 329) Herod asks Salome to drink wine with him but Salome gives a short, quick reply saying that she was not thirsty. Salome's assertion of not feeling "thirsty" or "hungry" points to her sad, depressive feelings, lack of appetite is an external manifestation of Salome's depressive state.

But as soon as Herod puts in his request before Salome to witness her dance, Salome begins to revert to her manic state. Herod says that if Salome dances for him he would fulfill any demand she puts forth. This is enough to throw Salome out of her depression. She gets the clue. Wilde clearly indicates this by saying that Herod's proposal makes Salome rise from her seated position.(CW568) Salome's acceptance of Herod's desire for a dance also indicates the compelling "sexual desire" (<http://www.ninh.....>) that Salome is filled with once again. It is because of her wish to obtain Jokanaan and satiate her desire to kiss him that Salome gets ready to perform a dance before Herod in return of which she would ask for Jokanaan's decapitated head. Wilde describes her dance through two unique aspects -- one, the preparations done by Salome prior to the dance, and two, the sensuous dance itself. The preliminary actions that precede the dance include the bringing of perfumes and seven veils by the slaves, and then the taking off of Salome's sandals. The perfumes and seven veils suggest Salome's sensuous looks where as her bare feet imply an erotic, energetic dance. Salome veils herself only to unveil herself again during the course of the dance. Joseph Donohue has called this act of unveiling "a strip-tease." (2002, 131) Salome is in a state of mania, and through her provocative behavior successfully captivates the male gaze. A maniac usually possesses unrealistic beliefs in one's abilities and powers but Salome, though a maniac is

able to prove her abilities to seduce a powerful ruler like Herod. With her foot bare, she “sculpt(s) her body in ways that capture and overthrow the male authority.” (Pressley, 1977, 11) Salome’s dance is a triumphant display of her powers that expresses and accomplishes “her defiance of Herod’s advances and her mocking courtship of Jokanaan.” (Shenion 138)

In the final moments of the play as Salome holds the decapitated head of Jokanaan, she behaves like a delirious maniac. She is “wildly excited” (Coleman 328) to finally fulfill her desire. She says that she is so irresistibly drawn towards Jokanaan that she has become “athirst” for his beauty and “hungry” for his body. She had created a space that belonged exclusively to Jokanaan and herself. Like a delirious maniac, she transcends all barriers put forth by human beings or circumstances. Though she is eventually killed by Herod’s soldiers, yet by the time they rush towards her, she has already become “indifferent to everything, even her own fate.”

Conclusion

What we see from these speeches of Salome is her quest for a selfhood undeterred by circumstances or compulsions. She has so evolved that any restraint has become incomprehensible and will not deter her from her avowed purpose. The way that Wilde builds up to this narrative crescendo is far beyond the regimentation of his times. He dexterously uses a fractured spatio-temporality to juxtapose the various dimensions of coming to terms with an irreconcilable selfhood that would see no bars in its wake. Using allusions and inter-textualities he parallels and contrasts events and characters in a true postmodern vein that start jumps him into a postmodern dialectics.

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Internet Resources

- www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publication/bipolar-disorder/complete-publications.shtml
- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/bipolar-disorder>

The End