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Monstrous and Beautiful: Jungian Archetypes in Wilde's *Salomé*

A Thesis by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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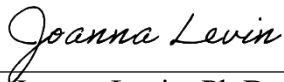
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Monstrous and Beautiful: Jungian Archetypes in Wilde's *Salomé*

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ABSTRACT

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by Nayana Rajnish.

The subject of my research is the 1891 play *Salomé*, by Oscar Wilde and my thesis addresses the modern psychological implications of the cultural truths revealed by Wilde's re-vision of the myth of that biblical femme fatale. I argue that in fashioning a tragic heroine out of a female monster figure of "Immortal Vice", Oscar Wilde created a document that captures two contradictory narratives: one in which Salomé plays the heroine of a tragedy and another in which she performs the role and functions of a villain. By employing Carl Jung's psychology of the archetypes, I am enabled to read Wilde's play as a cultural and psychological phenomenon that (self-consciously) constructs a religious and patriarchal narrative around its central female character, which captures her in a tragedy of socially imposed destruction. Ultimately, this paper poses a psychological assessment of *Salomé*, in which Jungian archetypes illustrate--at a psychic level--Oscar Wilde's precocious and liberal-minded modernizations of a two thousand-year old myth.

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Monstrous and Beautiful: Jungian Archetypes in Wilde's *SALOMÉ*

“The mystery of love is greater than the mystery of death” (Wilde 604).

In *Salomé*, Oscar Wilde created a unique myth dialectically opposed to but fundamentally based on the original biblical account of the story of *Salomé*. On Wilde's stage, *Salomé* performs the role of a psychic trope and archetype; and with her performance, Wilde is enabled to critique the millennia-old myth that had built up around *Salomé*, a myth which has successfully labelled her a ‘femme fatale’. In this paper, we shall delve into the psyches of *Salomé* and Jokanaan, the two central characters of Wilde's play, who reflect in their individual contents human aspects which have long been part of the ‘collective unconscious’ of the human race but remain timely and anchored to cultural mores. Two dialectically opposed selves, together they reveal in their interactions with the elemental, instinctive and universal force of desire, psychological clues about the many cultural problems faced by *Salomé*'s problematic psychic archetype. Through our reading of Jungian psychology, the cultural problem of this biblical femme fatale and killer of John the Baptist, can be explicated as the psychological troubles faced by *Salomé*, whose problematic being and creation can be traced back directly to her patriarchal and religious ancient-world society. In doing so, we follow in the footsteps of Oscar Wilde, to present a reading of the two thousand-year old biblical myth of *Salomé* where the problems faced by the central female character represent something essential, universal and mythical about her society, herself and the human condition in general.

We must first familiarise ourselves with the specific moralistic, cultural lessons of the source text (as found in the Gospels of Matthew [14:3-12] and Mark [6:17-29]) before we can attempt to decipher Wilde's modernizations and subversions—which signal the end of that biblical villainess and mark a critical, liberal revision of her two thousand-year old story. The

biblical myth of Salomé is an example of a religious depiction of womankind which *used to be* fundamentally linked to the human condition, its being answering both the call of nature and the civilizing restraints of culture.

Salomé begins her story as a memorable, beautiful dancing princess from the Court of Herod Antipas, Caesar-sanctioned ruler of Roman Perea (former Judea) and Galilea, in the First century. Strictly within these biblical accounts, Salomé is that beautiful figure who performs two important actions: she dances for her stepfather Herod and upon the advice of her mother, obtains as reward the beheading of the captured messianic prophet John the Baptist. By the law and language of the Gospels, Salomé is found guilty of appropriating her considerable feminine charms to satisfy her own immoral desires; while the real villain of the tale is her mother, Herodias, who by virtue of having a reason to seek the beheading of John, succumbs to murder out of envy and hatred. It is no mystery why Herodias--who only became the Queen of Judea after getting rid of her first husband and marrying his brother--would want to silence the prophet and his powerful and inconvenient religious condemnations of her actions (which grossly violated the Mosaic law of the time). Remarking upon this biblical myth, Diane Long Hoeveler argues: "In a narrative that is ultimately about a power struggle between two men—one representing religious, spiritual power and one embodying secular authority—the woman suddenly asserts herself, like a bad dream, like a remainder of a society in which women had both religious and political power and could wield that power for their own ends" (Hoeveler 89). Although the beginning is shrouded in vagueness, the myth of Salomé and her beauty fulfils itself (and its inherent problematics) by becoming that famous, beautiful and terrifying face of 'Woman' to her ancient roman world.

According to Hoeveler, Salomé's deeply gendered myth is a cultural phenomenon powerful enough to be capable of extending its argument about gender beyond the end of its narrative. Hoeveler posits that the evolution of attitudes towards the emotions engendered by Salomé were themselves gendered. This she claims, is manifested in the phenomenological fact that women prove more often than not to be the writers of sympathetic depictions and progressive, liberal narratives of the Salomé character. At the same time, parallel interpretations by the male sex have (supposedly) always led to warnings and horror stories about the many evils and vices pictured within her character and femininity (89).

Hoeveler's particular reading of Wilde's *Salomé* actually positions itself as the trump card in her own patriarchal argument about the Salomé myth, because the narrative actions that lead to and climax in the beheading of 'Jokanaan' are read as a "dream text": "in which women the embodiment of evil, sexual depravity and Nature are finally eradicated by a powerful father-figure" (101). Hoeveler's argument is constructed upon powerful mythopoeic and psychological precepts: on the psychic natures of women in patriarchal structures and the religious (Christian) myths about evil and human instincts and their many connections to femininity as proclaimed by that western cultural patriarchy. In this paper, we will be able to use her insights on the nature of power in such a symbolic, gendered space and benefit from her understanding of the long mythic history of the Salomé figure but what we will find will essentially prove the very opposite of the argument she makes about Wilde's *Salomé* (and the still-gendering myth of Salomé).

In opposition to the work of scholars like Hoeveler, Christopher Nassar and Nataly Shaheen, who present a reading of Salomé "as a symbol of pure evil", I find Wilde to have created in his *Salomé* an eminently sympathetic and tragic human character (Chilcoat 1). Taking up after recent scholars like Laura Chilcoat, Heather Marcovitch and Joseph Donahue to name

just a few, my own research explores Wilde's *Salomé* as a narrative about a "monster turned classically tragic heroine" and as a feminist myth portraying sympathetically the Victorian world's New Woman--a liberated female figure who struggles to express a positive sexuality in a rigidly ordered, patriarchal world (Chilcoat 1). Of these arguments, what is important are the ways in which Wilde deviates from the original, biblical Salomé's historical facts, done as it is to provide his heroine with more agency and activity in the story that is being (re)told, about her.¹

On the subject of Desire and Beauty, in her "Princess, Persona and Subjective Desire", Heather Marcovitch postulates that the character of Salomé can be seen to extend the aesthetic argument of *Dorian Gray* (91), doing so as a figure of Eros (Love/Beauty) pursuing her own desires. As a woman living in an ancient, superstitious world, Salomé faces a significant roadblock levelled by public morality upon one of 'her' kind and Marcovitch argues that in response, Salomé crosses gender lines with her use of a masculine force of will to grant her feminine desires. Scholars like Yeeyon Im and Amanda Fernbach have likewise taken note of the infamous "green flower" that Salomé promises to display in public to the Syrian Guard, Narraboth in reward for his conceding to Salomé's desire to speak with the prophet in the prison. A covert sign of homosexuality in Paris at that time, this and the various other homosexual references and allusions made in the play (and extra-textually in the illustrations of Aubrey Beardsley) have been the main evidence for the persuasive argument that Wilde's Salomé is a transsexual, transgender "Other" figure in response to the original. This line of thinking expressed by Diane Hoeveler in her "Reading", is inclined towards making much of Wilde's supposed self-identification with his Salomé figure, but my reading will show that while he may

¹ For an extensive study into the historical sources that Wilde changes, adapts and suits to his own purposes in order to do what Joseph Donahue terms [Wilde's] "attempt at treating his subject with radical originality" within the confines of its "conventional and traditional" approaches, Peter Raby is best consulted ("Death Distance and Desire", 125).

be flirting with the rules of gender, he does so mainly to illuminate his readers on their existence and effects. While some consensus can be achieved by agreeing that Wilde crossed and re-crossed gender lines for many reasons (here in *Salomé* and in his own life), there is more to be made of his revelations of the gendered beliefs of the world that had originally drawn those boundaries in the first place. Here, Wilde the aesthete has some precocious, modern insights to share about the particular problems and conflicts inherent in Beauty itself and those people blessed (or cursed) with it.

Founder of the branch of psychology known as Psycho-spiritualism, Carl Jung was the first to suggest that universal archetypes constitute the components of the unconscious of every human psyche. Archetypes of the ‘Collective Unconscious’ like the Id, Ego, Super-Ego, Persona and Shadow, Anima and Animus and the Self form the universals of each human psyche that “are inherited with the brain structure... [as] systems of readiness for action and ... emotions and images at the same time”; and get passed down through the generations from parent to child in the form of myths and fairy tales, the esoteric teachings of religion and biological, genetic inheritances or DNA (Gallagher 1). Any popularly recognizable narrative symbol or motif, such as the hero, the journey or the prize of the beautiful woman, which is universally salient and constantly recurring in different cultural forms, also carries membership to the category of archetypes. Thus, found both inside human beings and outside in society and culture, archetypes are psychic images or innate ideas which provide a blueprint to life and the human experience, by condensing one singular universal human experience into a “feeling toned idea” which is communicable, inherited and affective (Gallagher 1). In this way, cultural archetypes are products of an individual psyche’s sub-conscious projection of ideas about the Self onto Object and Audience in his/her world. Thus, within Jungian psychology, the *Femme Fatale* is a psychic

archetype who represents a somewhat underdeveloped and negative manifestation of the latent *anima* in men. In both men and women, there is a male animus and female anima which *can* undergo four stages of development, in relation to attitudes of psychic functioning.

The phrase “femme fatale” is French for "fatal woman" because traditionally in stories featuring her, it is the role of the femme fatale to try to bring about the destruction of the story's hero. In literature, art and culture, the femme fatale attempts to achieve her hidden purpose by employing her superlative sexual allure and bartering her highly valued, sexualised ‘favours’ among her bevy of enamoured fans and admirers. Thus, positing that the whole purpose of *anima* development in males is about their opening up to the possibility of greater emotionality and spirituality, the traditionally negative perception of her character is by Jung, attributed to the unhealthy effects of derogatory projections of the Masculine upon the Feminine principles. And although traditionally such roles were restricted to women, in the modern and post-modern world the uniquely liminal, gendered character of the femme fatale teaches if anything, that the most dangerous ‘woman’ in any religiously patriarchal culture is the one who challenges traditional gender roles and represents themselves socially as enjoying a positive relationship to vices, sins and other illicit pleasures. And Jung teaches that the negative perception of such ‘loose women’ can be psychologically attributed to self-deluding projections which are constructed by underdeveloped male psyches, subjected to a strict patriarchy.

The first step of Wilde's rewriting was the creation of the set which would feature his reinterpreted heroine. The particulars of his setting such as the moon (also considered a mirror for Salomé and a contemporary symbol of homosexuality), the ‘Dance of the Seven Veils’ and the psychically resonant characters themselves add to the creation of a comprehensive and nuanced, historical environment to his play. In *Salomé*, Wilde surpassed all his previous dramatic

works, to create an exotic ancient-pagan-world narrative weaving together a story composed in the classical art form known for specializing in the Greek tragic hero, peopled by Wilde's symbolist set and props and set in the time and place of Herod Antipater's ancient roman court. It excels its form by speaking through all that orientalism and ornament of a universal, psychological, human truth.

1. The Story around the Tragic Heroine

There are several important characters and aspects of the original biblical episode that either do not feature at all in this revision or can be seen instead in new forms and cast in the then-new light of Victorian modernity. First to be featured in the list of dramatis personae here along with its expected main characters are additions of representatives from almost all known cultures and societies from that historical time of the original biblical episode; and the role and dialogues of these characters, of the Cappadocian, the Nubian and the philosophical arguments carried on between the Jewish priests to name just a few, all perform the important function of representing their historic-cultural personage to the play.

This historicism is as much a direct result of Wilde's decadent, artistic and symbolist tastes as it is part of an attempt to recreate Salomé's biblical episode. Details like the Jewish priests' argument over scriptural theology or the presence of the many slaves of the Tetrarch taken from different Roman colonies, remind us that the philosophical and cultural reality of this mythic story is inherently fragmented and politically divisive; far from a utopia, this was a superstitious and religious world with slaves and tyrant Romans kings. In this regard, the masculine, economic, Romanesque political power that is represented in Herod Antipas contains within it the politicking of a colonial ruler, himself only a subsidiary and representative of the original Caesar.

In certain places Wilde even exceeds the history of the original narratives in this quest to give his narrative a full cultural setting; this is best illustrated in the naming of Jokanaan. Due to the popularity of the story of Salomé, it is a relatively easy task to identify the prophet in the prison- Jokanaan as the represented figure of ‘John the Baptist’. A cursory search into the origins of the name that is alternatively rendered in the play as Iokanaan and Jokanaan, will reveal the Hebraic history behind this name. The later Christian name “John” is derived from the Hebrew Yohanan, Yochanan and Johanan, all of which are acceptable versions of the name of the Jewish God: YHWH (Yahweh). Popular in both the Jewish and Christian traditions, the name John features prominently in the New Testament, being borne by a large number of personages including one of the apostles and the Baptizer of Christ.

In going back to revive the Hebraic name for his version, Wilde clearly returns his character and representation of John the Baptist to the old Hebraic tradition from which he hails, in which he was the prophet Elijah (or Wilde’s Latinised “Elias”). This Hebraic tradition is hardly referred to in an off-handed way. In Wilde’s play, ‘Jokanaan’ is a priest in the tradition of the Old Testament and his dialogues are all strict and punishing judgements of the many vices and iniquities that could be found sheltering within that decadent Roman court. Mimicking the prophetic language, imagery and tonality of various biblical inspirations including the Song of Songs, the “Voice of Jokanaan” captures the attention and imagination of the Princess Salomé, even before he is released from his prison cistern. This “Voice of Jokanaan” speaks much good of the Son of God and the Lord above him, but for all other living creatures which are unsure of such divinity, he has only terrible and exacting punishments and declarations of vice and sin without any trial or grace. The God of Jokanaan is a world apart from the later-to-come and far nicer God of the New Testament. But Salomé still somehow responds with attraction and sexual

desire to the prophet who after one look at Salomé proclaims thunderously over and over again his religious judgement of her: “Back, Daughter of Babylon. By woman, came evil into this world. I will not listen to thee, but to the voice of the Lord God” (Wilde 590).

By experimenting thus with the historical facts grounding his play in the bare outline of a brief biblical episode, Wilde created a dramatic vision which speaks of a universal, archetypal and foundational myth—with cultural and psychological truths that might be shared among all human natures and cultures hailing from a particular time-period. As such, the historicity of Wilde’s play has been able to do more than just recreate a place’s cultural setting; these cultural details perform the task of transporting back from the pages of history, an ancient morality to a modern audience. But not merely as a distance in time, Wilde manages to make that historical morality seem yet very emotionally present, so that the nuance and meaning of the play’s action seems to echo out from across that different culture and time period, representing something universal yet timely.

In his deconstructive confrontation of this old myth, Wilde issues a challenge to the teachings of the original by retelling more or less the same story but from a radically new perspective and morality. Jokanaan’s fearful dismissal of Salomé, which is characterised and reiterated by his consistent refusal to indulge in the popular act of gazing upon her, is hence representative of the rigid morality of the Old Testament. In dismissing Salomé, he and his morality are distinctly caught in the act of wrongfully condemning and villainizing her femininity. In the figure of the Tetrarch, there is a clear judgement of the man who is painted as a rich, diseased and incest-mongering ruler. But by enacting judgement upon Salomé for her final perversion through Herod, Wilde seems to be saying that such a political power can recognise, even if it won’t legitimate, the religious and mystical sanctity contained in the life of Jokanaan.

When Herodias refuses to perceive, like everyone else does in the play, some kind of psychologically revealing symbolic representation of her daughter upon the blank canvas of the moon, in that act Herodias reveals the distance between herself and her daughter. No matter how powerful the sexuality of her daughter is, she appears not to perceive the promise of danger within it nor does she legitimate it as something other-worldly or even as a problematic unique to Salomé's personality. In the act of refusing to see the symbolisms represented in her daughter, Herodias rejects her altogether, stooping even to deny and demean that powerful image, which has far outstripped her own.

Symbols are yet another patchwork part of Wilde's play, and the meta-narrative special effects created by their symbolism, function in the play as the metaphors of a universal, instinctive, imagistic language, which can be perceived by the characters onstage as well as the audience to the play. This language (and human instinct) is predominant in Herod's decadent court and can be perceived variously as a powerful force within the psyche of every person, a unique weapon in Salomé's hands and the most religiously villainized human instinct of that time: Desire. This is made obvious by the main symbolic action in *Salomé*—a beautiful teenager performs a dance so mesmerising that the Tetrarch Herod is willing to offer her half his kingdom, and instead as reward, she prefers the head of an imprisoned messianic prophet, who had caught her fancy. In the negotiations (after the "Dance of the Seven Veils") between Herod and Salomé about what the reward should be, both characters deal with and attempt to tempt the other with strong moral-coloured imagistic desires: John's decapitation, Salomé's perverse promise and desire to kiss his lips under any circumstances, the 100 gilded white peacocks of Herod's bribery, the throne of Herodias and even the iconic performance of the Dance of the Seven Veils (Wilde 601). All these formulate symbolic images which are offered up in the

forbidden language of desire. These images are presented in trade, bribery, gift and reward; they have real-world exchange value and are used mainly to satisfy human desires. Moon, money, images of wealth, desire and power speak in Wilde's play, an instinctive universal human language, which has been forced to hide and obscure its transactions because it carries negative connotations and provokes severe religious disapprobation. Yet it is an undefeatable instinct within humanity, and most of the desire in *Salomé* is felt for that ultimate symbol and perfect face of desire--beautiful Salomé.²

Symbols like the blank canvas of the moon perform the many roles available to a symbol, but not so just to the audiences to this dramatic work; they are perceived as such even within the ancient world of the play's setting by these ancient characters themselves. The moon is Salomé's biggest and most predominant mirror, at times it has even been able to present prophesying images of Salomé, but along with whatever the moon reflects of Salomé, something else about the person pursuing this "gaze" is also always reflected back. Heather Marcovitch has already observed that, "the moon assumes whatever significance the viewer attributes to it" so when it seems to represent "blood" or "a mad woman" to Herod (Wilde 599-600), these seemingly negative images present themselves as ill-omens to the superstitious Tetrarch, who is nevertheless blinded by his lust for his step-daughter. But we as audience have been witness to both visions which in their turn, do prophetically come true in the grim future; where to satisfy one powerful will, much blood is spilt and the madness that Herod previously dismisses as a

² Consider as an example of the "imagistic language of desire", the evocative words used by Herod Antipas to convince Salomé, when Salomé asks for the head of Jokanaan as reward for her dance and Herod offers her anything else from his kingdom instead: "I am sure that Caesar himself has no birds so fine as my birds. I will give you fifty of them. Their beaks are gilded with gold, and the grains that they eat are gilded also and their feet stained with purple. When they cry out the rain comes, and the moon shows herself in the heavens when they spread their tails. They will follow you whither-soever you go and in the midst of them, you will be like the moon in the midst of a great white cloud" (602). Humanity clearly desires Fantasy and fantasy alone seems capable of satisfying human desires. Desire's main dealings are to do thus with Beauty, Power and Fantasy.

nightmare, manifests itself in the final image of Salomé and the play--as a personalized vision of hell.

The nature of the human face of evil and the judgement of punishment upon it is another historical reminder that the world from which this seemingly great, universal truth about femininity arises is yet a superstitious and quite young world where a person could still have cause to know and fear the occult, witchcraft and devil worship. It's a world where religion reflects much of the light and goodness within mankind but at the cost of binding one to a rigid code of ethics, officiated by a priestly sub-section of society. Desire and especially illicit desire in this ancient and superstitious world have become rendered as the old and undefeatable enemy. And as a beautiful female, Salomé's powerful performance of femininity was uniquely capable of greatly disturbing the religious peace of her world. Because Salomé's unique beauty gifts her the ability to conquer all her numerous admirers and rule them all by her super-power of desire, simply for having or rather, being something that is highly desirable to almost everyone within the play (and for its audience outside of it too). Thus, it is by embracing this questionable power over questionable instincts that Salomé's human face takes on the role of the monster--representing a human evil to her many storytellers and audiences for two thousand years.

Salomé's role as the living representation of Desire is built upon her superlative personification of female Beauty. Here, Wilde very neatly anticipates the "male gaze" attack of 1970s feminist Laura Mulvey, because the play's many reflections, mirrors and attempts at gazing upon its main protagonist, while setting her up as an Object of Desire, nevertheless forms but a part of the narrative around her; not all of which is in support of this vision. Moreover, as the heroine of her own tragic story, Wilde's Salomé is hardly a character who gives in easily to the sexist, reductionist 'villains' of her story--whose inherent prejudices, religious beliefs and the

particular time-period in which this play is set precludes them pre-emptively from contending quietly with a powerful female character.

Through Wilde's historical and humanistic storytelling, Salomé becomes our perspective and emotional foothold on to this ancient world and through that act, the awakening and shocking and bold new heroine of this retold epic. This is Wilde's greatest contribution to the myth of Salomé: that he frees her from playing and replaying for centuries the villain in the story of the death of John the Baptist. On Wilde's stage, Salomé is at the centre of Herod's court and the tragedy that is set therein is 'her' story.

But not even as this heroine who stands at the centre of her own story is Salomé allowed to escape her mythic fate and the narrative judgements that condemn this misguided tragic figure to her symbolic destruction. The popular Greek tradition of the Tragedy is uniquely and perfectly suited to containing within it the stories of just such powerful and attractive heroes who suffer from very human faults. First to the tragic scene, Aristotle defines in his *Poetics* a tragic hero as "one who must evoke a sense of fear and pity in the audience. He is considered a man of misfortune that comes to him through error of judgment" (*Aristotle's Poetics* 45). The main feminist selling point of Salomé is that she becomes so understandable a character even as she satisfies her most inhumane desires. The tragic hero is thus a very human character, who might be blessed with some superhuman ability or talent but finds himself/herself paying for it in very human transactions of sorrow, loss and death. Now that we can finally see her as a human being, we can commence reconstructing the puzzle of her psyche from the various clues Wilde leaves us.

2. Psychology of the Archetype

Jung who believed “first and foremost that myths are psychic phenomenon that reveal the nature of the soul”, theorized that the archetypes in myths reflected not “just the mythologized processes of nature” and “objective occurrence” but also subjective, “symbolic expressions of the unconscious drama of the psyche” (Jung, 9.6). To the student of Jungian theory thus, the larger social narrative of the patriarchy within *Salomé*, can be seen instead from the more intimate viewpoint of a psychological drama taking place within the psyche of the two key players--Salomé and Jokanaan. Salomé’s social performance and acculturation to her society as ‘the femme fatale’ has succeeded in trapping her within that social ‘role’ and function as the Object of Desire; elsewhere Heather Marcovitch has noticed that like Dorian Gray, “Salomé is trapped in her *persona*, the aestheticized image of herself that she projects to the world—as an Object of Desire” (Marcovitch 89, italics mine). Because “she is presented as a *fait accompli*” as Hanna B. Lewis notices, in order to grow such a psyche, other aspects to herself and especially all that which directly offends against her Persona have had to become repressed and relegated to the Unconscious, where they have organised and weaponized—i.e., her Shadow and her Animus. There is much within Salomé that is more than her outer beauty and instinctual knowledge of desire, and not being allowed to grow consciously, it has all unconsciously organised against her dominant Persona. And it is that which reacts so instinctually and violently to meeting with her opposite, the spiritual prophet Jokanaan.

For at the heart and mind of it all, I propose here that the tragedy that occurs is an ultimately mythical, human response to a meeting of matched opposites from the Animus-Anima gender principle: within Salomé, the feminine ‘anima’ instinct, associated to feeling, intuition and the right hemisphere, is highly developed and in its fourth stage, which is symbolised by

Jung as Sapiientia or Sophia, “wisdom transcending sensory perception” (Gallagher 4). As the master of man’s immortal lust for her, Salomé is thus master of an instinctual, physical, empathetic understanding of ‘man-kind’. Jokanaan’s animus from the other side of the spectrum, is in the fourth and final stage of the masculine principle, which is associated with the left brain, thinking and sensation; symbolized as the Mahatma Gandhi, the “wise guide to a spiritual truth”, that psychic trope clearly forms the archetypal opposite to Salomé’s feminine knowledge of physical desire and truth (Gallagher 5).

One can perceive the outer physiological actions and narrative developments which provide the evidence of just such an inner psychological drama within this psychically resonant tragedy in its single act. The plotline of the heroine’s inner psychological drama within the story of *Salomé* has four major points of action and a well-known dramatic plotline, which registers another debt to the Hellenistic prototypes. The main action within Wilde’s play can be understood as created by a climactic meeting between two opposite Selves—Jokanaan and Salomé; or even as a confrontation of Salomé with some dangerous new Knowledge.

The exposition of our heroine’s psyche is set up at the beginning of the play during the establishment of our historical setting in the world of the play--which takes place in a terrace outside the banquet hall of the Tetrarch Herod and under a brilliant silver moon. It is proclaimed in the play’s very first words, spoken by the Young Syrian Guard, an enslaved captive of the Tetrarch: “How beautiful is the Princess Salomé to-night!” (Wilde 583). Salomé is the embodiment of female beauty to the world she lives in and so to her belongs the psyche of someone who must deal constantly with being such a desired and visible character. As the play’s central and most beautiful character, Salomé’s image is always visible and subject to the act of the Gaze: this is established, deconstructed and re-established in the play in many ways that

mirror and contort and distort the numerous visions of Salomé and her timeless Beauty. “Salomé’s *persona* is refracted through the perceptions of others, so as she is constantly seen as the object of Desire; the only actions she knows how to perform are those that stem from desire” (Marcovitch 94). Although Marcovitch does not herself employ the word ‘persona’ in the Jungian sense, the Jungian meaning fits very well atop the more common understanding of the ‘persona’ as a social performance of the Self in public. Salomé’s beautiful image in pleasing and affecting so many is at once given to contain a thousand images projected back onto her of her audience’ desires, hopes and lust for her and her superlative beauty and body. “As the object of the play’s gaze she is kept inanimate and static” (Marcovitch 93) and she cannot exert power over her own image; and in fact there are so many images of and eyes upon Salomé that she needs another mirror, to contain and reflect her beauty and her mood swings and even something essential about her Nature. Wilde establishes this meta-narrative ‘mirror’ and prophetic symbol in the Moon in the play’s very first dialogues’: “Look at the moon”, “She is like a little princess”, “You would fancy she was dancing” (Wilde 583). Foreshadowing encounters soon to come, the Moon becomes established in the first scenes of the play as a symbol for Salomé and a mirror to her nature and tempers.

Wilde also establishes the problem with this constant gazing at Salomé by having his many lusty characters staring, constructing and restructuring images of desire and lust for Salomé from the cultural perspectives of many social classes, who partake in often differing and contradictory relationships to the young princess. Narraboth, the captured Syrian Guard, “must not look too much upon [the Princess]” (586), but the Tetrarch Herod is enabled by his crown to look whenever he wants upon Salomé, even though he is her stepfather. Nevertheless Salomé is no easy victim and the erstwhile Object of Vision uses her first words in the play to reverse the

male gaze, and shine back the uncomfortable light of truth upon this offending, relentless devotee: “Why does the Tetrarch look at me all the while with his mole’s eyes under his shaking eyelids? It is strange that the husband of my mother looks at me like that” (586).

Once Salomé walks into the open terrace, seeking rest from her stepfather’s “mole’s eyes” and she is established in our perception as ‘Beauty’, the time is ripe for a second action. This is when Salomé finds and pursues a new experience and knowledge after meeting with her fatal match and dialectical opposite: Jokanaan. In this, the beautiful Salomé gains knowledge that will challenge everything she has ever believed until now.

Salomé and Jokanaan are opposite to each other and their meeting is the painful meeting of a matched pair of opposites: what one holds holy and divine forms the other’s very picture of sin and vice and each destroys the other, as the final consummation of their meeting and their self’s individual response to the ‘other’. The difference between the two is symbolically represented as the metaphysical tension between the physical and the spiritual. Salomé of the beautiful body, with her female wiles and mind, perfectly embodies an obsession with the realm of physical, touchable and visual truth. But this materialistic, physical truth of desire and lust was well-known in Salomé’s time as a potent force and a carnal truth, with (most) religious teachings then teaching one to mistrust said ‘truths’. Jokanaan of the emaciated priestly body and the larger-than-life spiritual belief, represents just such a self-denying, self-castigating ideology which is as completely opposed to Salomé’s physicality as it was possible to be at the time. And as that priestly opposite to her femme fatale, Jokanaan represents the spiritual metaphysics and judgemental energies lacking within her, while Salomé’s femininity represents an essential emotional failing within Jokanaan.

Fascinated by “how wasted he is! How like an ivory statue”, Salomé begins her twisted obsession by conceiving of the desire to continue to gaze at his “terrible” body and listen to the dark judgements of the Voice of Jokanaan (589). Soon after reversing the Gaze, she becomes directly amorous of his body and it seems like “there is nothing in the world as white as thy body. Let me touch thy body” (590). Beautiful Salomé in learning Desire, is forced to confront an issue against which her ‘traditional’ female weapons prove unassailable and moreover, in learning desire, she must confront a humiliating, new emotion to which she had never before succumbed and which therefore, had much to teach her which would shock and humble her. For Jokanaan’s religion, which is so prejudiced against the Beauty of Salomé, cannot stomach having become the Object of Salomé’s Desire; it appears to him a singularly immoral, perverse action and it provokes his utmost revulsion and judgement. And Princess Salomé who knows no other field of knowledge than what the desire for her superlative beauty has taught her, can only respond in one way to this new information.³ Salomé becomes even more monstrous in Jokanaan’s eyes when she begins to respond with desire to his religious castigation of her; but there is something almost dream-like in this sudden outburst of desire and lust; after all this is the first expression of desire made by a girl who came out onto the terrace to escape her stepfather’s “mole’s eyes”.

Intoning dark and brooding prophecies of the death of the current order and the coming of the new Lord God, the Voice of Jokanaan captures with his doomsday prophecies and cold

³ Throughout the play, Salomé returns again and again to her one mythic weapon when she is faced with a problem or a particularly compelling desire: when she wants to go against Herod and speak with the prophet Jokanaan who is imprisoned, she seduces the guard Narraboth that was supposed to stand exactly in her way; in response to the first cursory sacrosanct rejection of Jokanaan, Salomé responds in the only language of love and acceptance she has ever known- by desiring even his painful rejecting person and his emaciated physical form; and finally in wanting to have the final word with Jokanaan, Salomé willingly prostitutes herself to her stepfather’s wishes for a dance, using that rare performance as a means to extract a favour more precious than the throne of Herodias from the unwilling but defeated King.

and distant words Princess Salomé's heretofore untamed heart. When Salomé introduces herself to Jokanaan as the daughter of Herodias, he attempts to repel the "Daughter of Sodom [and] Babylon" by invoking the sanctity of his religion and condemning her and her maternalistic line of iniquity: "thy mother has filled the earth with the *wine* of her iniquities and the cry of her sins has come up to the ears of the Lord". But Salomé turns his language and his rhetoric around and by perverting it to satisfy her own desires, once again inflames and offends and incites this polar-opposite character to herself: "Speak again Jokanaan, thy voice is *wine* to me" (589, italics mine). In the act of desiring the spiritual, the physical deeply offends the spiritual's sensibilities and becomes more and more monstrous in its view, but the physical ideal has displayed some mutation, or growth, in desiring the spiritual for it has learnt to find something to value within that opposite ideology. When Salomé finds herself appreciating as beauty those aspects of Jokanaan's emaciated body which do not conform to traditional aesthetics, she demonstrates her growth and desire to learn his spiritualism, his counter-mythology to her physical truth: "There is nothing in the world so *white* as thy body" (590, italics mine). And though the spiritual is less attached (being not cumbered by any desire for the physical), it too becomes more and more entangled with the physical, when that physical world comes to resemble a suitably nightmarish Shadow form to its own Self; "Let me touch thy body" profanes unknowingly but so unerringly against that pure, white temple of Jokanaan's body, for it has only become so by means of deep and strict religious denial and by denying itself any form of physical knowledge and pleasure.

Salomé's discovery of Desire proves to have the potential to threaten a society. The shocked members of her court seem just as offended by the nature of Salomé's perverse desire-- "to kiss the red lips of Jokanaan" (which requires her to win his death and decapitation so as to satisfy that desire) as they seem to feel betrayed by the fact that it is the beautiful Princess

Salomé who is conceiving and enacting such desires. As observed by Narraboth, the Young Syrian, it is considered most improper that “[Salomé] who art like a garden of myrrh...who art the dove of all doves” (584), should look at this priestly figure and with such irreverent desire for him. Not only is Salomé discouraged from gazing upon Jokanaan, (for the gaze is traditionally a male privilege) but in choosing Jokanaan, as a most improper object of her lust-full vision, Salomé offends greatly against his spiritual sanctity; which makes for a dear victory to the beautiful Salomé. In the end, Salomé does manage to inspire some sort of reaction in Jokanaan, but it is hardly an equal declaration of love; Salomé only offers more offense by swearing to Jokanaan that “[she] will kiss [his] mouth” and in response, Jokanaan says “I do not wish to look at thee. Thou art accursed, Salomé, accursed be thou” (591). So, the stage is set for the conclusion to this meeting between Salomé and Jokanaan. Since both have offended each other, neither may rest while the other lives, and only one can triumph over the other by fulfilling their own desires and subjecting the loser to the other’s destruction.

The third psychological action of the play takes place as the climax to the initial meeting between Salomé and Jokanaan, after both have tested each other and each having failed some of these tests. Offended but otherwise unmoved by Salomé, Jokanaan comes out of the first meeting to return to his prison cistern, as the victor of their interchange. He has gotten the better of Salomé, by her calculation, because she has not charmed him as is her wont, but instead has become herself charmed for the first time ever by someone else and faced their rejection, all in the same strange experience. The third action is a power play, which consists of a series of traded favours. All transactions conducted to satisfy one’s desires exist as transactions of power within the play’s world. The Tetrarch, as ruler and as step-father of Salomé, is at the same time both the most and least powerful person in the room: although his wealth is the only one of the court’s big

enough to satisfy Salomé's desires for Jokanaan ("even unto half of my kingdom") and despite getting to witness her "dance of the seven veils", he has no bigger hold over her desire and wishes than her own mother does.

Deploying the costly favour of her "Dance of the Seven Veils" as per its traditional purpose as a unique bartering tool belonging only to femme fatales, Salomé barter the one big favour she could grant to the only man in the entire kingdom capable of giving her the one inimitably perverse thing, for which she has conceived her first desire in the world: the head of Jokanaan. But the dance ends and the reward as it is asked for betrays her perversion, for Salomé demands "the head of Jokanaan" and steadfastly refuses each of Herod's offers--his one hundred golden peacocks and many other threats, pleas, omens and bribes, to relieve him from his promise to grant any desire of hers as a reward (594). Salomé's victory signals not just the defeat of Jokanaan but also that of the political, economic rule of the Tetrarch.

Forced into performance of his duty, Herod signals and eventually "a huge black arm, the arm of the Executioner, comes forth from the cistern, bearing on a silver shield the head of Jokanaan" (603). But Salomé's demand had prompted outrage and anger among the court and in a demonstration against her perverse victory, one by one all the servants and courtiers (with Herod first among them) remove themselves and all the light from the stage leaving her to stand alone, centre stage, holding the "seized" and bloody prize-head of Jokanaan. On the stage, which is not even lit by the moon and totally abandoned by the court and servants, the sole visible figure speaks a long, halting and confused monologue to the head of Jokanaan, alternatively bemoaning and glorying: that "thou didst reject me.. and I still live, but thou, thou art dead... Wherefore dost thou not look at me Jokanaan?" (599). Salomé still believes she could have had her happy ending if only Jokanaan had not refused to look upon her and love her Beauty.

Eventually she kisses his mouth and exults at that victory for a moment: “Ah! thou wouldst not suffer me to kiss thy mouth, Jokanaan. Well! I will kiss it now. I will bite it with my teeth as one bites a ripe fruit.” (605). But this final perversion of Salomé of the lover’s kiss is revealed to Herod in an act of ‘God or Nature’. Though the Tetrarch has walked away from Salomé and the stage has been carefully divested of any light and all people, circumstances and Nature conspire against Salomé and through the action of a stray moonbeam of light, she and her perverted action are revealed to the Tetrarch, who is fortuitously turned around to just the right viewing spot on the stage. Thus, the forces of both Culture and Nature in her world have united in their judgement of Salomé; and while her own nature seems to be fragmenting (with this betrayal of her mirror-moon), the natural forces of the world are to be seen lending a helping hand in her final destruction. All of Salomé’s society and Nature itself are united in their verdict against her.

The kiss’ display of power and perverse desire breaks the spell (cast by beautiful and terrifying Salomé) and prompts the fourth and final action of the play: Herod screams out that final judgement “Kill that Woman”, which immediately summons “Soldiers, who rush forward and crush beneath their shields, Salomé, daughter of Herodias, Princess of Judea” (605). And thus, a moral, emotional and seemingly instinctive judgement is enacted by Herod’s authority, representing her society’s rejection of beautiful Salomé and her perverted desires. Salomé’s destiny seems to have been tragically decided for her the day she was gifted Beauty and life in the rigid cultures of the Ancient World, because the physical perfection of Salomé embodies female power and female beauty. And the Female to the ancient, religious mind, represented the “Other”--hidden, unconscious and mistrusted-- aspects of the human Self. If Woman is already the “Other” in this ancient world, a powerful and beautiful woman can be no less than a monster in her relationship to the more normative, masculine and relatable story’s hero, from whose

“Self” perspectives most of these stories are told. With Jokanaan’s character portraying the “Self” here; in Salomé and Salomé’s image of vice and femininity, that patriarch’s point of view of her society perceives and projects onto her female form an ancient and undefeatable evil of mankind--that evil of human nature and natural desires--the natural biological instinct for sex and desire. Salomé forms an image of the Unnatural, having strayed so far off the traditional submissive norm befitting a woman of her times.

The real tragedy of Wilde’s Salomé is thus a matter of that psychological inner drama. The real tragedy of Wilde’s story about Salomé is the fact that she too, could not truly conceive of a world beyond Beauty and the Physical. Her only means of action and agency even on Wilde’s stage has always been within the realm of desire and the power that her superlative desirability grants her over her admirers. Trapped under the gaze of the patriarchy for so long, in Wilde’s play Salome avenges herself by re-appropriating the gaze and redeploying it back onto the most principled patriarch in her purview. In doing so, the myth about Salomé comes crashing full circle upon her own head, on Wilde’s stage, where one is able to perceive the veracity of two contradictory truths--of the narrative against Salomé (which paints her as the female monster) and her own personal, mostly unconscious truth, in which she is the heroine of a tragedy. The person constantly treated differently as a monster has ended her story by demonstrating the exact monstrosity projected on to them as coming from within themselves; the sad truth which we have unearthed centuries later (in Wilde’s play) is the fact of it being a self-fulfilling prophecy-- that said monstrosity had been unconsciously taught to this person by means of her particular acculturation to society.

Indeed through our reading of Jungian psychology, we are able to project Salomé’s problematic ‘femme fatale’ archetype back upon the other central character in her story:

Jokanaan (John the Baptist). Carl Jung that “woman has carried for man the living image of his own feminine soul and likewise man has carried for woman the living image of her own spirit” (“Femme Fatale”); appositionally, the anima in men forms an essential part of their unconscious just as the animus comprises a big portion of the unconscious female psyche. And it is an essential part of the process of an individual’s self-actualization to recognise and come to terms with all the unconscious archetypes and complexes hidden in the Self. So that sexualised, aesthetic form of the ‘temptress Eve’ which formulates the primary stage of the *anima*, represents thus just the potential (and no conscious development) of the female principle.

Within the context of Wilde’s play, the tension between male and female principle is categorised as that metaphysical tension between the spiritual and the physical. The ‘femme fatale’ represents the very first (and under-developed) stage of physical knowledge; Salomé’s power represents a control only over the bodily and physical aspects of human nature, conversely Jokanaan’s spiritual power represents a kind of control and knowledge over spiritual and thus abstracted (religious) knowledge. The individual weakness of these two principles manifest in their disdain and disregard for each other, which one demonstrates in disdaining the physical and the other in provoking (and thus offending) the spiritual. Both can be dialectical opposites of each other, but from the Jungian standpoint, we perceive that in truth, they are both halves of a bigger whole. Jokanaan’s Old Testament God is not one who can recognise and legitimate Salomé and her aspects of power and beauty, and Salomé demonstrates at various points in the play the inherent smallness of her knowledge for the only knowledge she possesses and the only field of power she ever commands is over Desire and the body. But through Wilde’s eyes, Jokanaan is caught red-handed in the act of constructing a religious diatribe against Salomé, while Salomé herself in desiring Jokanaan demonstrates a desire to learn and gain more

knowledge than was traditionally known (and allotted) to this Queen of Beauty. Thus, on Wilde's stage, the femme fatale clearly forms a picture of a powerful, female and *wrongly accused* Other figure to the rigid, masculine and closed off, spiritual Self of Jokanaan.

Wilde's Salomé appears to confirm the fact that cultural myths and legends speak to a larger psychological fate shared by the human race. The mythological battles that take place within mythic settings and between human archetypes are as Jung put it, "first and foremost psychic phenomena revealing essential natures of the soul" (Jung 9.19). Changes and revolutions in a culture cannot take place without those changing tides correspondingly adapting and updating those archetypes and tropes that have become too untenable and unwieldy for that culture, in one time period. And Wilde's *Salomé* marks just such a new character and storyline for the once biblical villainess. As Wilde's tragic heroine, her culture is enabled not just to view Salomé pityingly but also to perceive in action the ways in which her society groomed her (unfairly) to play the "Other" to the hetero-normative, superstitious Self or "Hero" of her ancient world. For in her portrayal of feminine beauty and in learning to desire Jokanaan, Wilde puts together specific narrative actions that allow psychic resonances within the play. Here, one is merely acknowledging the facility of the play which with its physical/spiritual tensions, its commentary on Power, Desire and Beauty and its terrifying and tragic heroine, has been carefully enabled to craft a story which captures two contradictory truths: the biblical myth of that villainess and a feminist myth about a tragic heroine, who is a reinvention of that biblical figure.

After Oscar Wilde, Salomé's character underwent a major cultural renaissance in the western, Christianised world and became the main influence for numerous plays, films and stories of all media. Richard Strauss' 1901 opera, Alla Nazimova's 1922 silent film and many

other such productions lay claim to this play as their cultural forefather. Wilde is directly responsible for creating a new myth which views and celebrates Salomé as the heroine of a religious, sexual, social 'Other' to society. After Oscar Wilde, Salomé's myth changed undeniably to provide a more liberated, progressive take on that two thousand-year old myth of the female as society's oldest villainess.

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