

FROM DOCILE DANCER TO FEMME FATALE:
THE EVOLUTION OF SALOME

by
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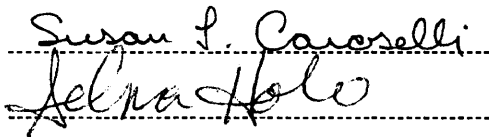
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INTRODUCTION

For centuries, artists and writers have been intrigued by the biblical figure of Salome. Her story has a long, enigmatic, and ambiguous iconography. From her biblical origins as a docile dancer obediently following her mother's instructions, to her late nineteenth-century incarnation as a femme fatale, Salome's iconographic evolution reflects the degeneration of a notorious legend, and the patriarchal vilification of an innocent woman. Scholarly monographs that have appeared in the English language primarily evaluate her tradition in folklore and literature, with only minor concern given to her artistic image. In order to assess the importance for a current study of Salome's portrayal in the visual arts, it is useful to briefly examine the most significant modern publications on Salome.

The history of twentieth-century scholarship of Salome commences in Germany in 1909 with what is considered the finest chronicle of her story, the pseudonymous monograph by Reimarus Secundus, Geschichte der Salome von Cato bis Oscar Wilde. In 1912, Hugo Daffner published an abstract of this book as Salome: Ihre Gestalt in Geschichte und Kunst. Although dated, Daffner's abstract is useful for its copious illustrations. The first noteworthy source in English appeared in 1953 with Blaise Hospodar de Kornitz's Salome: Virgin or Prostitute?. This small book contains valuable information on the early history of Salome, yet only gives a cursory treatment to her visual image. The only other notable work in English is a 1960 book by the French

literature specialist Helen Grace Zagona. Entitled The Legend of Salome and the Principle of Art for Art's Sake, Zagona's research deals almost exclusively with the theme of Salome in nineteenth-century literature. In the almost thirty-five years since the date of Zagona's publication, a study has yet to be written which examines the artistic evolution of Salome from her earliest-known image to the late nineteenth century. The present study will attempt to fill this gap by tracing her artistic development with special attention on the two most important periods of her visual representation: the Renaissance and the fin-de-siècle.

Part One of this paper, "The Development of Salome Before the Nineteenth Century," examines Salome's persona from her biblical role in the death of John the Baptist to her appearance in Northern Renaissance prints. Salome's ingenuous biblical reputation diminished as John the Baptist became a more prominent figure in Christian dogma. Beginning in the fourth century with the early Church Fathers' determinate conviction of "woman as evil," Salome became the embodiment of artists' misogynistic fears and erotic desires. While materialism and depravity threatened the moral fabric of the Christian church during the Middle Ages, the Church Fathers used Salome to signify the immoral reverberations of lascivious dancing. For narrative cycles in Italian Renaissance churches, Salome represented the ignoble antithesis to the venerable probity of John the Baptist. In secular Renaissance works, artists were allowed the freedom to interject sexual allegories into portrayals of

a submissive Salome. Meanwhile in Northern Europe, printmaking facilitated the broad dissemination of her image to alert viewers that women of Salome's aggressive nature exist in contemporary society. During the Baroque and Rococo periods, the legend of Salome declined in popularity. Her frequent appearance in art and literature did not to resume until the nineteenth century.

Part Two, "The Resurgence of Salome in the Nineteenth Century," traces Salome's re-emergence in German literature by the mid-nineteenth century, and in art by the fin-de-siècle. Her foreign origins became an important component of her representation. Artists depicted Salome as both a westernized woman and as the racial "other." In a westernized appearance, Salome symbolized the destructive forces of liberated women who threatened men's entrenchment of authority. As the "other," Salome represented an object of male fantasy, conciliated through displacement into an exotic dominion. The late nineteenth century proved to be the climax of the public's preoccupation with the theme of Salome. Throughout centuries of iconographic development, the image of Salome came to signify the contradictions apparent in depicting a woman whom Western society interprets as both "passive" and "aggressive," the "other" and one of "us."

PART ONE:

THE DEVELOPMENT OF SALOME BEFORE THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The Gospels of Mark and Matthew narrate the story of the beheading of John the Baptist. The incident occurred in Galilee while Christ's reputation was beginning to grow. Having heard of Christ's fame, the tetrarch Herod Antipas believed that Jesus actually was John the Baptist risen from the dead. Herod had imprisoned John for publicly declaring the unlawfulness of his marriage to his brother's wife, Herodias. The Gospel of Matthew chronicles the episode as follows:

For Herod had apprehended John and bound him, and put him into prison, because of Herodias, his brother's wife. For John said to him: It is not lawful for thee to have her. And having a mind to put him to death, he feared the people: because they esteemed him as a prophet. But on Herod's birthday, the daughter of Herodias danced before them: and pleased Herod. Whereupon he promised with an oath, to give her whatsoever she would ask of him. But she being instructed before by her mother, said: Give me here in a dish the head of John the Baptist. And the king was struck sad: yet because of his oath, and for them that sat with him at table, he commanded it to be given. And his head was brought in a dish: and it was given to the damsel, and she brought it to her mother.¹

In wishing for John's death, the motives of Herod and Herodias are revealed through their methods of psychological betrayal. Perturbed by John's censure

¹ Matthew 14: 3-11. The Bible used for the first two quotes is a 1914 translation of the Latin Vulgate containing the Old Testament originally published by the English College at Douay in 1609, and the New Testament originally published by the English College at Rheims in 1582. The author compared all biblical citations to the modern Greek translation by Richmond Lattimore and found the texts to be essentially similar.

of his audacious marriage, Herod is the first figure who intended to have John killed. His failure to bring about the death of the Baptist leads to Herodias's conspiracy. She uses her daughter as an agent to bring about the death which Herod wanted, but was afraid to command for fear of public retribution towards the beheading of a Prophet. John's death ultimately results from Herodias's shrewd recognition of Herod's weakness. After regretting the request for John's head, and having the opportunity to decline it, Herod nonetheless acquiesces to his stepdaughter. Herodias's plan establishes the correlation between woman's vileness and man's vulnerability.

The Gospel of Mark presents a stronger opposition between the iniquity of Herodias and the men who are portrayed as passive victims:

For John said to Herod: It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife. Now Herodias laid snares for him: and was desirous to put him to death, and could not. For Herod feared John, knowing him to be a just and holy man: and kept him, and when he heard him, did many things: and he heard him willingly. And when a convenient day was come, Herod made a supper for his birthday, for the princes, and tribunes, and chief men of Galilee. And when the daughter of the same Herodias had come in, and had danced, and pleased Herod, and them that were at table with him, the king said to the damsel: Ask of me what thou wilt, and I will give it thee. And he swore to her: Whatsoever thou shalt ask I will give thee, though it be half of my kingdom. Who when she was gone out, said to her mother, What shall I ask? But she said, The head of John the Baptist. And she was come in immediately with haste to the king, she asked, saying: I will that forthwith thou give me in a dish the head of John the Baptist. And the king was struck sad. Yet because of his oath, and because of them that were with him at table, he would not displease her: But sending an executioner, he commanded that his head should be brought in a dish. And he beheaded him in the prison, and brought his head in a dish: and gave it to the damsel, and the damsel gave it to her mother.²

² Mark 6: 18-28.

In this account, Herodias originally wished for John's death. In order to protect the validity of her marriage, Mark emphasizes Herodias's duplicity in planning the decollation. Her initial determination to bring about the death of John invalidates the tetrarch as the instigator of the crime. Herod's involvement in the beheading diminishes out of his respect for John. Herod is even commended for his virtue as a man who is loyal to his oath and loyal to his stepdaughter. Mark writes that Herod "would not displease" his wife's daughter although he "was struck sad" to hear her request because he knew of John as a "just and holy man," not because he feared retaliation from his people. Mark uses these phrases to exonerate Herod for John's death. Through Herod's vindication, Mark establishes the distinction between women's deceitful power and men's honorable virtue.

Herodias's daughter occupies a subsidiary role to her mother and Herod in both Biblical narratives. The Gospels present her without a personal motive for the killing. She merely follows her mother's instructions and is innocent of any participation in the beheading. Her conduct after the slaying attests to her indifference to the death of John. Instead of keeping the head as an object for herself, she passes it to the woman who made the request for the decapitation. The docility of her dance, which later writers describe in vulgar terms, nullifies any sexual involvement between herself and John the Baptist. The Gospel authors do not even ascribe her enough significance to refer to her by name.

The Scriptures refer to Salome only as "the daughter of Herodias."

The early Jewish historian Flavius Josephus first named her as Salome, mentioning Salome in relation to the lineage of Herod the Great. He indicates that she married twice, first to Herod's son, Philip. After his death she married Aristobulus, the brother of Agrippa, with whom she had three sons.³ In this brief reference, Josephus does not malign Salome, nor is she in any way involved with the death of St. John. Josephus tells the episode of the Baptist's killing after Herod's military defeat by King Aretas of Arabia. Some of the Jews believed Herod's debacle was God's punishment for John's slaying. Because of John's influence over Herod's people, the tetrarch had him killed out of fear that John would instigate a rebellion.⁴ John's death occurs under very different circumstances in Josephus's account than in the Gospel stories.

Flavius Josephus cited Salome in terms of her dynastic ancestry and matrimonial alliances. One of the first Church Fathers to mention her dance was the prominent third-century theologian Origen who described Salome's dance as "pleasing, gracefully rhythmic movements."⁵ His harshest criticism of the dance concerned its "contrary nature to a sacred dance" because it led to

³ Josephus, 485.

⁴ Josephus, 484.

⁵ "Ta dokounta eurythma kinemata" or "motus eleganter compositi" (cited by Hospodar de Kornitz, 52).

the death of John the Baptist.⁶ The first three and a half centuries of the Christian religion did not propagandize Salome as immoral or lascivious. Her denigration began in the middle of the fourth century. During the rule of Julian the Apostate, St. John's sepulcher was found and divided by the pagans. The Emperor Theodosius consequently constructed a church in honor of the Baptist in Alexandria. At this time, Salome began to receive vituperation only in the cultural areas where the Baptist's sepulcher was found and near the site of the church built in his honor.⁷

The earliest Church Fathers to vilify Salome were St. Gregory Nazianzen, St. John Chrysostom, and St. Jerome. St. Gregory Nazianzen directed his accusations more at Herodias than Salome by stating, "You dance, but not the dance of that shameless Herodias that caused the death of the Baptist."⁸ St. John Chrysostom provided a fiercer attack in his description of Salome: "She enters by exhibiting her body and the virgin surpasses all the

⁶ Cited by Hospodar de Kornitz, 52.

⁷ Hospodar de Kornitz, 52-53.

⁸ "Orkhesai men, alla me ten Herodiados orkhesin tes askhemenos, hes ergon Baptistou thanatos" (cited by Hospodar de Kornitz, 53, 76).

prostitutes in her shamelessness."⁹ St. Jerome merely restated in Latin the two Greek Church Fathers' sentiments.¹⁰

Salome's perceived immorality was an appropriate topic to illustrate the theme of moral choice in the earliest representation of Salome in art. The Gospel of Matthew in a sixth-century Greek manuscript from Sinope depicts Salome in front of Herod's banquet (Fig. 1). A man rushes from the prison on the right and hands Salome the decapitated head. Herod reclines on a couch in accordance with the ancient manner of holding a banquet.¹¹ King David and Moses occupy the sides of the page. To the right, David holds a scroll stating, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints."¹² Moses's scroll, on the left, reads, "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God made He man."¹³ Although this early manuscript portrays the more compassionate of the two Gospel narratives relating to Salome, she has already become a visual symbol of immorality.

⁹ Cited by Hospodar de Kornitz, 3.

¹⁰ The Church Fathers never forgave the female descendants of Eve for her role in the Garden of Eden. St. Jerome reflected his misogynistic view in the statement, "Woman is the gate of the devil, the road of evil, the sting of scorpion" (cited by Hospodar de Kornitz, 76).

¹¹ Kuryluk, 196.

¹² Psalms 116: 15.

¹³ Genesis 9: 6.

Her debased portrayal will slowly develop and intensify throughout the centuries.

As material customs spread into the growing Christian church and began to debauch Christian morals through opulence and wealth, the Church Fathers used Salome as a manifestation of the evil repercussions of tempestuous dancing and the perversion it created. The most intellectual medieval philosopher, St. Thomas Aquinas, censured Salome with the words, "how cruel is that obscene dancer."¹⁴ To emphasize this obscenity, medieval artists focused on Salome's perceived vulgar dance. A most unusual method of dancing can be seen in a late twelfth-century Hortus deliciarum (Fig. 2).

The prioress of the Sainte-Odile convent, Herrade of Landsberg, illustrated the manuscript. Herrade shows Salome dancing on her hands. This bizarre dance is not an isolated representation; it appears in other medieval forms of visual imagery. Salome is in the same position in a thirteenth-century window from Bourges Cathedral,¹⁵ and in a tympanum above a side entrance to the Cathedral of Saint John the Baptist and Saint John the Apostle in Rouen.¹⁶

¹⁴ "Qualiter crudelis est obsoena saltatrix" (cited by Hospodar de Kornitz, 54).

¹⁵ Illustrated in Daffner, 63.

¹⁶ Illustrated in Daffner, 97.

She also appears in an English psalter from the early thirteenth century, bending backwards, her long braid touching the ground.¹⁷

Medieval depictions often portrayed Salome with other revelers such as servants, musicians, acrobats, and animals. A musician first appears with Salome on Saint Bernward's Column of Hildesheim Cathedral from ca. 1022.¹⁸ Through her contortionist postures and hedonistic cohorts, medieval artists likened Salome to a circus performer. Salome's dance was compared to a circus show in medieval literature as well. The famous Provençal verse romance Roman de Flamenca, written ca. 1270 by an anonymous poet, is a significant document of medieval social customs. The author describes Salome's dance in the following manner:

Then the minstrels rise....One plays the harp, another the viol, one the flute, another the fife, one the gamba, another the hurdy-gurdy, one recites the lyrics, another accompanies them....There are those who juggle knives, one crawls on the ground, another somersaults, another does a capering dance....¹⁹

The transformation of Salome's "obscene" dance into a circus act in the late thirteenth century was followed by a more civilized representation in the art of the Italian Renaissance. In this period, images of Salome often were

¹⁷ Illustrated in Daffner, 59.

¹⁸ Illustrated in Daffner, 50.

¹⁹ "Alors, se lèvent les jongleurs... L'un joue de la harpe, l'autre de la viole, l'un de la flûte, l'autre du fifre, l'un de la gigue, l'autre de la rote, l'un dit les paroles, l'autre les accompagne...Il en est qui jonglent avec des couteaux, l'un rampe à terre et l'autre fait la culbute, un autre danse en faisant la cabriole..." (cited by Masseron, 120; translated by Susan Caroselli).

included in narrative cycles depicting the life of St. John. On altarpieces and frescoes, the scene of John's beheading accompanied images of his birth, baptism, and imprisonment. Salome's image in these cycles appeared more dignified than her medieval portrayals as an immoral acrobat.

The fresco The Feast of Herod, painted by Giotto in the Peruzzi Chapel of Santa Croce, forms part of a narrative cycle depicting the life of St. John the Baptist (Fig. 3). Salome's presence in the scene appears on the surface to function as a minor character in the interest of conveying the narrative. She stands next to Herod's table during the presentation of the head. On the right side of the scene, she kneels and hands the charger to her mother. Salome's postures seem fairly innocent; she is no longer dancing on her hands or bending backwards. Her facial expressions do not suggest pleasure in the decapitated head. However, Salome's kneeling position held deeper associations for the *trecento* viewer. A Tuscan laud portrays Salome, on her knees, telling her mother, "Behold, dear mother, the head of the Baptist who said so much against us...Behold, he no longer speaks as he used to."²⁰ The relationship between Salome's pose and a verse from a common laud permitted the spectator to identify her kneeling stance in the fresco with the vile words she speaks to her mother in the laud. Although Salome conspicuously lacks

²⁰ "Ecco dilecta madre del Baptista la testa che fe' già tante parole contro di nui...ecco non parla più come far suole" (cited by Masseron, 121; translated by Susan Caroselli).

visible malevolence, she does not smirk at the head or carry a knife, her kneeling position communicates her vengeful intent with its association to the laud. An openly discernible expression of Salome's depravity may have been improper for an ecclesiastical setting. Through discreet postures, Salome provided early Renaissance artists with an emblem of malevolence, appropriate to illustrate the disparity between the exaltation of a narrative cycle's saint, and the popular belief in the iniquity which caused his demise.²¹

Giotto's fresco, The Feast of Herod, served as the prototype for a predella fragment by Agnolo Gaddi (Fig. 4). Gaddi's The Feast of Herod is noteworthy because of its iconographic relationship between the altarpiece and chapel. The predella originates from an altarpiece in a chapel built by Bernardo de' Cino Bartolini di Nobili in Florence's Santa Maria degli Angeli.²² The chapel was dedicated to John the Baptist and St. James the Greater. The founding date of the chapel was July 25, 1387, the feast day of James. Documentation acknowledges the presence of the altarpiece at the chapel's first mass on Easter, March 29, 1388. The main panel of the

²¹ Salome's kneeling stance while presenting the charger to Herodias can be seen in other Florentine *trecento* narrative cycles of the life of St. John such as Andrea Pisano's South Doors of the Florence Baptistery. Illustrated in Daffner, 95.

²² The original altarpiece is now in Berlin (illustrated in Cole, pl. 1). The Feast of Herod and two other predella panels from the Nobili Chapel altarpiece are now in the Louvre. The other Louvre panels depict the Crucifixion and a narrative of St. James the Greater involving the sorcerer Hermogenes with a scene of James's beheading (Cole, 84-85).

altarpiece depicts Mary; the side wings portray Saints John the Evangelist and John the Baptist to the left, and Saints James the Greater and Bartholomew to the right. Bruce Cole proposes that The Feast of Herod would have been located under the altarpiece's image of John the Baptist on the left wing. The Crucifixion would have been placed under the center, and the St. James episodes under the right wing. Cole cites Federico Zeri's suggestion that there are at least four other sections to the Louvre predella: the Baptism of Christ, Hermogenes throwing magic books into the water, a female donor with four kneeling girls, and a kneeling male donor with his sons. Cole attributes only the Louvre panels to Gaddi.²³

Taking into account the suggestions of Cole and Zeri, the iconographic significance of the arrangement of the predella becomes apparent. As Cole observes, the panels signify acts of purification by water: Christ's baptism, the throwing of evil magic books into a river, and a reference to baptism through the inclusion of Hermogenes who was baptized by James.²⁴ The two roles of Saints John the Baptist and James the Greater, as baptizers and as victims of decapitation, provide an iconographic relationship appropriate for the chapel's patron saints. Salome's appearance in the scene is important because of her role in the death of John. She maintains the same kneeling position as in

²³ Cole, 85-86.

²⁴ Cole, 86.

Giotto's fresco. As previously discussed, Salome's kneeling stance conveyed her pernicious intent through its relationship to the common laud which proclaimed Salome, on her knees, uttering vengeful words about John to her mother. Gaddi elaborates on Giotto's fresco by including the headless corpse of John at the foot of the tower. It is an appropriate addition to Gaddi's scene because it relates to the headless body of James in the nearby predella. Salome's presence in The Feast of Herod helps to illustrate the final episodes of John's life by symbolically aligning the decapitation of John with that of James.

The visual narrative of Gaddi's predella appears emotionally restrained in comparison to Donatello's bronze relief The Feast of Herod executed between 1423 and 1427 for the baptismal font of Siena Cathedral (Fig. 5). The relief is renowned for its early use of linear perspective. Donatello's perspectival arrangement allows the action to forcefully emerge from its architectural limitations. The fictitious architecture intensifies the narrative by placing each episode in its own separate space. By illustrating several events of the story within a compact area, Donatello conveys those elements which are crucial to the understanding of the narrative. In the foreground, a soldier presents the head of the Baptist to Herod. The heads of two servants and a viol player are seen in the middle ground. The farthest set of arches display the delivery of John's head to Herodias.

Instead of displaying a headless corpse, Donatello depicts the decapitated head twice. A strong contrast emerges between reactions to the severed object. In the background, Herodias stoically looks at the head presented in front of her. In the foreground, Herod and his guests can barely control their emotions as they witness the presentation of the head. Salome dances on while Herod and his guests recoil in horror. Although Salome is not actively involved with the head, she is still accentuated in the foreground.

Only the heads of Salome and the soldier are fully modeled in the round. Salome's calm, if not stern, demeanor contrasts the horrific reactions of other foreground figures. Her dancing attests to her insouciance despite the display of a dismembered head. As in the scenes of Giotto and Gaddi, Salome's comportment may seem ingenuous on the surface. Yet her importance and involvement in the crime are communicated through her emotional reaction and Donatello's accentuation of her figure.

Apart from church commissions, paintings of Salome intended for private consumption appeared during the Italian Renaissance. These interpretations differ greatly from ecclesiastical works in that artists began to depict a passive Salome whose portrayal may contain erotic undertones. Images from the legend of Salome gained popularity in sixteenth-century Milan and Venice. Milanese artists commonly painted Salome with the decapitated head or with an executioner setting the head into a charger. She appears submissive in Andrea Solario's Salome Receiving the Head of the Baptist from

ca. 1507 (Fig. 6). In this scene, she compliantly looks downward as the executioner's brawny arm places the blood-sprinkling head into a shiny bowl.

It has been suggested that Salome was an appropriate subject for the "lavish and despotic court of Milan" because of the court's "reigning favourites, their erotic opportunities, their brokerings of sex and power, their perilous glamour."²⁵ Salome's complacency in Solario's painting mirrors the perception of women in these Renaissance courts. Practices regulating women's behavior at court forbade them from expressing emotions, speaking openly, or acting assertively. Court women were prohibited from conversation, and were required to demonstrate verbal temperance. Stefano Guazzo's 1575 treatise, Civil Conversation (Civil Conversation), describes the conduct of court women. He writes, "for conversing with loan sharks, thieves, adulterers, blasphemers, and other reprobates, it is easy to resist wickedness, while conversing the ladies, even decent ladies, one feels oneself moved by lust."²⁶ Accordingly, court women encountered a moral contradiction: the more chaste they were or appeared to be, the more sexually enticing they became.²⁷

²⁵ Joannides, 168.

²⁶ Cited by Jordan, 151.

²⁷ Jordan, 151.

Solario's portrayal of Salome appropriates the role of the Renaissance court woman. She averts her gaze from the viewer to look demurely at the object brought before her. She does not express gratification or active involvement with the bleeding head. Despite Salome's chaste appearance, Solario may have intimated a deeper meaning to this painting. As the court woman provided sexual attraction through her passivity, so does Solario's depiction present a possible sexual allegory. Ewa Kuryluk equated the Baptist's bushy head with a penis, "its bleeding becomes associated with the bleeding occurring during defloration and menstruation; castration is seen as the climax of intercourse with a powerful female or as her revenge."²⁸ This interpretation seems untenable in that Salome does not appear powerful. The allusion to castration would be more convincing if Solario had painted a vengeful Salome. Instead, the executioner's arm embodies the only powerful element in the painting. Solario intensifies the scene by depicting only one appendage of the executioner. The brawny arm boldly projects outward from the right side of the painting, firmly clenching the Baptist by the hair. In contrast to this portrayal of strength, Salome appears compliant. She does not express jubilation over the delivery of the blood-dripping head. The only sexual allegory in the painting may be an interpretation of seduction evoked by Salome's inactive comportment. By representing Salome as passive, Solario

²⁸ Kuryluk, 192. Paul Joannides also associates Solario's painting to castration and defloration (Joannides, 167).

aligns her with the Milanese court woman whose chastity elicited sexual enticement. His depiction of Salome may signify his society's perception of modest women as sensual objects.

Independent paintings of Salome were also popular in early sixteenth-century Venice. As with their Milanese counterparts, Venetian Salomes take on passive roles which have sexual connotations. The proliferation of her image in Venetian painting may reflect the indulgent lifestyle and permissiveness of Venetian society around 1500.²⁹ In Sebastiano del Piombo's Salome of 1510,³⁰ Salome rests the charger on a ledge located in front of a window (Fig. 7). Salome's passivity gives Sebastiano greater freedom to project his sexual fantasies onto her compliant body. Her demeanor is apparently improper because of her bare arm, sidelong glance, and pointing index finger. In Gottifredi's 1547 Il Specchio d'Amore (The Mirror of Love), a mother advises her daughter to use her bare arms to catch a man, "Rather, it might be well that you skillfully pull up your sleeve as far as you can, giving him the opportunity to touch your arm a little bit."³¹ The

²⁹ According to Michael Hirst, the Venetian state tried to control the profligate society in vain through such bodies as the Provveditori alla Sanità and the Magistrato alla Pompe (Hirst, 94).

³⁰ Paul Joannides believes the painting may actually represent Judith (Joannides, 167). His identification is questionable because the figure lacks Judith's common attributes of a knife, sack, and maidservant.

³¹ "Anzi sia bene che tu ti tiri destramente più su che puoi la manica, dandogli modo di toccarti alquanto il braccio" (cited by Hirst, 94; translated by

sidelong glance may indicate erotic seduction. Palma Vecchio, Bartolommeo Veneto, and Michelangelo utilized this expression in contemporary works. Ascanio Condivi, commenting on Michelangelo's Bacchus, singles out "the oblique and lascivious eyes."³² Lastly, Salome's pointing gesture may imply invitation or enticement.³³

Salome's portrayal reflects the Venetian man's interpretation of women's sexuality. Documentation in Venice at this time describes women's sexuality as passive, even when the woman encouraged sexual contact. Francescina, wife of "respected surgeon" Giovanni da Rechanato, initiated an affair with Benedetto da Argos. She had her maid arrange their rendezvous plans and transport notes between them. Despite these advances toward the affair, which led to scorn from the Avogadori, her sexuality was still described as passive:

Unmindful of her salvation, motivated by sensuous desires, in contempt of God and sacred matrimony as well as to the detriment, dishonor, defamation, shame and censure of master Giovanni, her husband, and her children,...she attracted and induced to herself Benedicto da Argos allowing herself to be known carnally by Benedicto....³⁴

As if not to threaten the virile psyche through sexual assertion, Venetian women remained objects of compliancy by allowing themselves "to be known

Star Meyer).

³² "Gli occhi biechi e lascivi" (cited by Hirst, 94; translated by author).

³³ Hirst, 94.

³⁴ Cited by Ruggiero, 48.

carnally." Cursed for the activity, but not for its inception (always accredited to the man), Venetian women were condemned for permitting men to use them for sexual purposes. Likewise in the legend of Salome, her innocent biblical behavior is obscured by the eventual outcome of her dance, the death of John the Baptist. Sebastiano's painting aligns Salome with the interpretation of such contemporary Venetian women as Francescina da Rechanato; her sexual passivity may allow herself to generate destructive behavior.

Prints were a powerful medium for the dissemination of the legend of Salome during the Renaissance in Northern Europe, as printmaking reproduced images in quantities. The popularity of the medium is due to several factors. The printing of visual images on lightweight pieces of paper allowed prints to be easily transported. The cost of purchasing a print generally insured that more people could own prints than other art forms such as painting and sculpture. Prints were also appreciated for their relatively small size. Renaissance owners often pasted prints into albums, thereby allowing for leisurely study in privacy.³⁵

The subject matter of Northern European engravings during the second half of the fifteenth century frequently involved images of women's domination over men.³⁶ Further interest in the subject emerged during the second decade

³⁵ Russell, 21.

³⁶ Besides scenes of women's iniquity in the story of Salome, engravings contained other biblical or fictional incidents that demonstrated men's

of the sixteenth century. The popular theme of women's power over men was an apparent obsession of the Netherlandish artist Lucas van Leyden. His various treatments of the topic may reflect his own fixation or the demand of such imagery from his patrons. His approach to the theme can be seen in his paintings and engravings, and most explicitly in his woodcut designs.³⁷ In Lucas's print Herod and Herodias from ca. 1512, women occupy the most prominent positions in the scene (Fig. 8). Herodias stands in the center of the composition. She seems ready to pierce the head with a knife.³⁸ Salome flutters into the room with her gown and sash billowing behind her, carrying the head on a charger. Salome occupies the foreground space in front of the modest banquet table. The focus of the women in the center and foreground of the composition marginalizes the men in the scene, with the exception of Herod. The disturbed tetrarch looks at the repulsive offering brought before his table. The other men are passive nonparticipants in the action of the

victimization by women. Included in this topos are Aristotle Ridden by Phyllis by the Master of the Housebook (ca. 1480) and Samson and Delilah by the Master E.S. (ca. 1460). Illustrated in Jacobowitz and Stepanek, 103.

³⁷ Examples of this theme from Lucas's early and late career include the painting The Card Players (ca. 1509) and the engraving Lot and His Daughters (1530). Illustrated in Jacobowitz and Stepanek, 102, 239.

³⁸ This detail occurred in French mystery plays. The stage directions for Jean Michel's fifteenth-century Mystère de la Passion read, "Here Herodias strikes with a knife on the brow of the head of Saint John and blood comes out" ("Icy frappe Herodyas d'un cousteau sur le front du chef de Saint Jehan et le sang en sort") (cited by Stuebe, 5; translated by Susan Caroselli).

scene. This print delivers the message that women are agents of destruction, and women possess control of the objects of death (the knife, severed head).

In order to clearly articulate the immediacy of this message to sixteenth-century viewers, Northern artists frequently situated Salome's story apart from the ancient Near-East. Salome is dressed in German clothing in Hans Baldung Grien's woodcut Salome from ca. 1511-1512 (Fig. 9). The architecture prominently seen behind Salome further places the event in a more current setting than biblical antiquity.³⁹ With a smirk on her face, Salome gazes downward at the anguished head of St. John. Grien warns the spectator that women of Salome's vileness exist in contemporary Germany and not just in biblical legend.

The Northern European concept of evil women's ubiquity appeared in humanist literature. Such works as In Praise of Folly by Erasmus, originally printed in 1511 and published in the Netherlands in 1512, and the writings Narrenbeschworung (Exorcism of Fools) and Die Schelmenzunft (Guild of Rouses) by Thomas Murner published in 1512, present satirical admonitions against folly in which the preoccupation of women's power over men is a component.⁴⁰ The moralizing poem Das Narrenschiff (The Ship of Fools) by

³⁹ Early Italian Renaissance artists sometimes depicted contemporary clothes and architecture in their scenes. However, these were part of narrative cycles in ecclesiastical settings, not independent creations meant for private viewing.

⁴⁰ Jacobowitz and Stepanek, 103.

the German humanist Sebastian Brant, originally appearing in 1494 in Basel, was the most popular book of its day. It had an enormous influence in Northern Europe and was translated into Latin, Low German, French, English, Flemish, and Dutch between 1497 and 1548. Brant's writings, exemplifying strict religious conservatism, were intended to uplift the reader, to ameliorate the political condition through moral regeneration.⁴¹ In Chapter 64 of Das Narrenschiff, entitled "Of Bad Women," Brant wrote, "Herodias and her daughter bade; To amputate the Baptist's head."⁴² He included Herodias and Salome among such other legendary "Bad Women" as Ahaziah's mother, Portia, and Clytemnestra. Brant affirmed the continuous existence of evil women from the past to the present by ending the chapter with the verses, "But wanton wives are far from rare, For Thaïs dwelleth everywhere."⁴³

The theme of vile women's pervasion in society appears in Israhel van Meckenem's engraving The Dance at the Court of Herod from ca. 1500 (Fig. 10). An elaborate, contemporary setting dominates the foreground. Meckenem dresses the dancers and performers in modern garments. Most women wear a tall, pointed hat known as the *hennin*. Originating in the Burgundian court, the *hennin* was worn throughout central Europe in the

⁴¹ Edwin H. Zeydel in Brant, 6-7.

⁴² Brant, 213.

⁴³ Brant, 215.

second half of the fifteenth century. Some of the figures wear *Schnabelschuhe* (long, pointed shoes) or wide-toed slippers that became stylish in Germany by 1500. Quatrefoil badges worn by the three musicians identify their position as public performers. The Münster town hall, near Meckenem's home town of Bocholt, conserves a similar piper's badge from the sixteenth century. Max Geisberg located documentation confirming that the Münster civic band contained three musicians, as in Meckenem's print, until a fourth was added in 1605, thereby suggesting that Meckenem based the engraving's dance on an event he witnessed in Münster.⁴⁴

Background scenes further situate the event in present society. On the left, Salome receives the severed head from the executioner, while blood streams forth from the Baptist's corpse. Indications of a modern setting in this background scene are Salome's *hennin* and a turreted structure. On the right, Salome delivers the head to her mother, while Herodias maintains a similar knife-wielding position as in Lucas's print. Although Meckenem may have merely wanted to portray a jovial event from his locality, the print may have served as an admonition to the viewer. Despite the visible appearance of mirth in society, modern woman's capability of nefarious destruction lurks in the background of familiar amusements.

⁴⁴ Cited by Shestack, no. 232.

Northern European prints and Italian Renaissance paintings represent the final periods of Salome's popularity in art until the fin-de-siècle. Interest in her legend decreased after the sixteenth century. Although some notable artists produced images of Salome in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries,⁴⁵ there was less demand for her pictorial representation. Scholars have not been able to interpret the legend's decline in popularity. A possible explanation is that the narrative of events surrounding the Baptist's death abated in favor of imagery displaying his head on a charger. This theme was a popular phenomenon in Italy during the early sixteenth century, and the demand for it continued into the seventeenth century. Domenichino, Ribera, and other Baroque artists frequently painted John's decapitated head in the manner of such *cinquecento* works as Andrea Solario's Head of St. John the Baptist of 1507 (Fig. 11). Seventeenth-century interest in the isolated devotional image (*Andachtsbild*) may derive from the Counter-Reformation obsession with the spirituality of martyrs, and the attention given to the contested relic head of St. John claimed by both Amiens Cathedral and Rome's church of S. Silvestro in Capite.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Such artists include Guido Reni, Rubens, and Tiepolo. Illustrated in Daffner, 230, 251, 267.

⁴⁶ To settle the dispute, Pope Clement VIII mandated in 1604 that Amiens should relinquish part of its relic to the Roman church, thereby acknowledging the legitimacy of the French relic head (Stuebe, 10-11).

The popular representation of the *Andachtsbild* in the Baroque and Rococo periods supplanted Salome's frequent depiction in art until the nineteenth century. Her transformation over a thousand years evolved from her earliest depiction as a symbol of moral choice in the sixth century, to her vile and seductive portrayal in the sixteenth century. Salome's Renaissance appearance as a sensual woman with a potential to destroy men foreshadows her nineteenth-century personification as a femme fatale. Her dual nature as an immoral object or sensual being will continue to be examined in the nineteenth century, yet her portrayal will become more complex as artists will consider her foreign origins to be a significant component of her artistic image.

PART TWO:

THE RESURGENCE OF SALOME IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The resurgence of Salome in the nineteenth century first occurred in literature. German interest in the study of folklore initially revived her legend as writers retold her story as a love story. The first nineteenth-century work providing an amorous version of the legend of Salome was Jacob Grimm's Deutsche Mythologie (German Mythology), published in 1835. Grimm recounted an early-twelfth-century tale written by Nivardus, a canon and scholasticus at St. Pharaïldis church in Ghent.⁴⁷ In his tale he wrote, "Herodias was madly in love with the Baptist and vowed not to marry any other man."⁴⁸ Consequently, the resentful Herod mandated the death of John. In desperation, Herodias solicits the head, douses it with tears, and tries to kiss the head until it recoils away from her and she is sent up into the sky. Nivardus's unusual account of the death of John the Baptist never gained official acceptance. It influenced songs and customs occurring on the Feast of St. John, but had fallen into oblivion until Grimm's folkloric study.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Nivardus associated Salome with the patroness of his church. St. Pharaïldis is the Latin name for St. Verelde. The Flemish name Verelde or Verylde phonetically resembles the German storm goddess "Fru Helde" to whom Salome was equated in the Middle Ages (Panofsky, 44-45).

⁴⁸ Cited by Panofsky, 45. Although Nivardus refers to her as "Herodias," it is clear that he is talking about Salome.

⁴⁹ Panofsky, 45-46.

Deutsche Mythologie inspired many contemporary writers including Heinrich Heine. In his 1841 epic poem Atta Troll, Heine continued the theme of Salome's responsibility for the beheading of St. John because she was in love with him. The French edition, translated by Heine himself, appeared in Paris in 1847; the poem was popular in France, where Heine had more followers than in his homeland of Germany. The main characters in the poem are Atta Troll, a dancing bear; Lascaro, the hunter in search of Atta Troll; Uraka, the witch-mother of Lascaro; a Swabian poet who is transformed into a talking dog; and Heine's three archetypes of the non-Christian legacy in art: Diana, Fey Abunda, and Herodias.⁵⁰ Heine describes these women as, "three marvels of beauty. Never will I forget this trio of amazons."⁵¹

Significantly, Heine alters these women's traditional symbolic associations with lascivious allusions. Heine's first heroine is the virginal antique moon goddess Diana, symbolizing the inspiration of pagan Greece. Instead of depicting her as the personification of chastity, Heine endows her with a salacious carnality: "Voluptuousness woke late in her veins, but with so much more vehemence, and in her deep eyes burns a veritable flame of

⁵⁰ Zagona, 24-26. Heine also refers to Salome as "Herodias."

⁵¹ "Trois merveilles de beauté. Jamais je n'oublierai ce trio d'amazones" (cited by Zagona, 28; translation by author).

hell."⁵² After Diana comes Fey Abunda who signifies the mystical resplendence of Celtic lore. The narrator extols the two figures' pulchritude and recounts how Christianity drove them into hiding "in the peaceful ocean of the imagination."⁵³

Herodias represents the final heroine, a symbol of the Jewish inspiration in literature. The narrator reveals that Herodias moves him more deeply than any other character. He clearly expresses her dual nature of divinity and iniquity:

And the third woman that profoundly moves thy heart, is it a demon like the other two figures? If it be an angel or a demon, this I do not know. One never knows with women where the angel ends and where the devil begins.⁵⁴

Instead of relying upon the biblical account of the death of St. John for his poem, Heine declares the beheading took place out of unrequited love, not revenge or insult. Herodias passionately kisses the decapitated head:

She always carries in her hands the plate where one finds the head of John the Baptist, and she kisses it;-yes, she kisses with fervor this dead

⁵² "La volupté s'est éveillée tard dans ses veines, mais avec d'autant plus de véhémence, et dans ses yeux profonds brûle une véritable flamme d'enfer" (cited by Zagona, 28-29; translation by Susan Caroselli).

⁵³ "Dans l'océan pacifique de la fantaisie" (cited by Zagona, 29; translated by Susan Caroselli).

⁵⁴ "Et la troisième femme qui émut si profondément ton coeur, était-ce un démon comme les deux autres figures? Si c'était un ange ou un démon, c'est ce que j'ignore. On ne sait jamais au juste chez les femmes où cesse l'ange et où le diable commence" (cited by Zagona, 29; translated by Susan Caroselli).

head. Because she once loved the prophet. The Bible does not say this, - but the people kept the memory of the bloody loves of Herodias.⁵⁵

This fictionalized version of the death of St. John created a prurient myth which contributed to the transformation of Salome's visual portrayal. By introducing the theme that Salome killed John through unfulfilled lust, writers such as Heine provided artists with a literary antecedent for depictions that allude to sexual involvement between Salome and the Baptist. As we shall see, artists will further degenerate Salome's iconography due in part to the influence of these libidinous literary accounts.

Heine's characterization of Salome, as a woman full of both divinity and iniquity, inspired ambiguous visual portrayals of Salome during the fin-de-siècle. Despite Salome's presence in early-to-mid-nineteenth-century literature, it was not until the end of the century with increasing demands for women's liberation, and the popularity of the femme fatale theme, that Salome returned as a prominent figure in art. In addition to the fascination of Heine's sexual interpretation of the story, part of the allure of the legend lay in its exotic Near-East setting. At the turn of the twentieth century, depictions of Salome illustrated her as one of "us," a fair-skinned woman of the West.

Artists captivated by Salome's foreign origins also presented her as the racial

⁵⁵ "Elle porte toujours dans ses mains le plat où se trouve la tête de Jean-Baptiste, et elle la baise;-oui, elle baise avec ferveur cette tête morte. Car elle aimait jadis le prophète. La Bible ne le dit pas,-mais le peuple a gardé la mémoire des sanglantes amours d'Hérodiade" (cited by Zagora, 32; translated by Susan Caroselli).

"other," an object of sexual attention safely removed from Western reality.

As women began to challenge the hegemonic patriarchy, Salome came to represent the individual female in society whose pernicious sexuality and very existence frustrated the domination of men. According to Carol Duncan, Salome was understood at this time to be "an alien, amoral creature of passion and instinct, an antagonist to rather than a builder of human culture."⁵⁶

Images from the late nineteenth century frequently present Salome as a potential threat. However, the extent to which she asserts her power and sexuality is dependent upon the audience for which the particular image was intended. Depictions meant to be seen by visitors to Salon and Secession exhibitions emphasize the danger of Salome's feminine sexuality.

Representations produced for both heterosexual and homosexual viewers have also disassociated femininity from power by illustrating Salome with the physical characteristics of a man. Women who asserted their equality were occasionally perceived as "masculine" in appearance and action. The prevailing belief at this time was that a "real woman" of the late nineteenth century accepted her social position and would not even consider her independence from male supremacy.

Lovis Corinth's Salomé of 1899, painted for the Munich Secession exhibition of 1900, demonstrates one of many fin-de-siècle paintings that de-

⁵⁶ Duncan, 304.

emphasize Salome's foreign lineage (Fig. 12). Despite minor accoutrements of floral headdress and earrings, Salome's pale skin and Caucasian features define her as a Western woman. The artist attempts to situate the story in its exotic locale by dressing the surrounding characters in loincloths and veils typical of paintings based on biblical subject matter. Present-day art historians have referred to this smattering of Oriental costumes and scenery as "studio models at a costume ball"⁵⁷ and "sordid stage props rented for the occasion."⁵⁸

However unconvincingly Corinth's Salomé illustrates the Near-East, the artist does associate the power of a westernized woman with feminine evil. As an athletic bare-chested man bows down to Salome while supporting the charger on his head, she leans forward, breasts exposed, to inspect the eyeballs of John the Baptist with her bloodied fingers. The figure of Salome is characterized by her brazen sexuality and the rapture of her inspection of the decapitated head, as she intensely focuses on her domination over St. John.

The transformation of Salome to a westernized woman who asserts her own power reflects social changes that were occurring around the time Corinth painted the subject. The appearance of women outside traditional maternal and conjugal roles in the late nineteenth century produced fear and anxiety among many men. Women who challenged their traditionally imposed oppression

⁵⁷ Uhr, 119.

⁵⁸ Rosenblum, 458.

were often seen as a threatening force that would disrupt men's entrenched authority within society.⁵⁹ Demands for women's rights were so pronounced by the end of the nineteenth century that one of the publicly funded events during the Paris World Fair of 1900 was an International Congress on the Condition of Rights of Women. With the expansion of cities, women asserted a more visible presence outside of the home. The Industrial Revolution necessitated the hiring of women in offices and factories, with the result interpreted as an unwelcome burden or as a means of procuring freedom. As an example of the increasing role of women in the public sphere, the number of French laws concerning women rose drastically from fourteen in 1884-1885 to thirty in 1894-1895 and fifty-one in 1904-1905.⁶⁰

Women's changing position in society at the turn of the century reflects the complexity of issues faced by artists when portraying Salome as a Western woman who is sexually powerful and potentially destructive. The American painter Ella Ferris Pell created a westernized image of Salome (Fig. 13). A native of St. Louis, Missouri, Pell studied under William Rimmer at Cooper Union in New York City. She travelled to Paris in the 1880s and became a pupil of Jean Paul Laurens, Ferdinand Humbert, and Gastonne St. Pierre at the Academie des Beaux-Arts des Champs Elysees. While in Paris in 1890, she

⁵⁹ Heller, 9.

⁶⁰ Heller, 8-9.

painted her image of Salome and exhibited it at the Salon des Artistes Français. The following year the painting was displayed at the National Academy of Design in America.⁶¹ Both venues would have attracted a predominantly male heterosexual audience.

Pell's painting permits the viewer several interpretations. Salome may represent a seductive temptress who provides sexual delectation to the male viewer with her exposed breast and averted gaze. However, Pell characterizes Salome with strength and salubrity. Salome's muscles and hefty frame attest to the figure's physical power. Just as the existence of women in society was becoming more prominent, Pell firmly asserts her character's presence. Pell completely divorces Salome from an exotic setting. The artist places Salome against an empty backdrop, enabling the figure's presence to physically dominate the painting.

By portraying Salome as a Western woman who may be enticing through her sexuality, yet threatening through her physical strength, Pell alludes to women's ambiguous role in fin-de-siècle society. According to Reinhold Heller, the dichotomy that became the prevailing viewpoint during the 1880s and 1890s was of women as either idealized beings who guide men to eternal happiness, or as physical creators of dissension and eventually

⁶¹ Dijkstra, 392.

death.⁶² Likewise in Pell's painting, Salome symbolizes both the sensual capacity of women to please men and their potential to lead to man's death.

This contradiction is also represented by artists who depicted Salome as the racial "other." Henri Regnault's Salomé, painted for the Salon of 1870, emphasizes her Eastern origins (Fig. 14). Salome's attire, the setting in which she appears, and her long, dark hair attest to her foreign lineage. Her costume also serves to accentuate her sensuality. Salome's blouse falls off her right shoulder to expose part of her chest, and her diaphanous skirt reveals both legs and thighs. She demurely slips out of one of her sandals with a look of coquettish playfulness. To intensify Salome's uncivilized disposition, Regnault places the skin of a wild animal under her feet. In Regnault's depiction of Salome as the racial "other," she is represented as the proper object of sexual (male) attention. Instead of illustrating the action of the story, the artist provides the male spectator with an opportunity to behold the voluptuousness of a foreign temptress. Yet with these visual codes the artist also associates woman's sexuality with the threat of destruction: Regnault's Salome holds a long knife in her left hand. By equipping her with a dangerous symbol, Regnault warns the male heterosexual viewer that a woman can use her femininity to lure men to their death.

⁶² Heller, 10.

The tremendous success of Regnault's Salomé in the Salon of 1870 directly inspired further perpetuations of Salome as the racial "other." The taste for exoticism in French literature provided additional impetus for artists' conceptions of Salome. Motivated by a century of archaeological explorations and publications, Gustave Moreau and other painters and authors participated in the popularity of Oriental subjects. Moreau's interest in the legend grew out of his familiarity with French literature concerning the Orient, as well as the presence of Regnault's painting at the Salon.⁶³

Moreau's painting Salome Dancing Before Herod of 1876 presents Salome as a woman whose power is overshadowed by the lavish atmosphere and copiousness of ornamental decoration that place the figure in a fantastical setting (Fig. 15). The warm palette adds to the rich display of exotica. Salome's authority would assert itself more forcefully if Moreau eliminated the top half of the painting. Instead, the geometric perspective leads the viewer back into the world above Herod's head, an imaginative world containing an array of Persian arches and Moorish columns. Moreau's perspectival arrangement draws the spectator's attention to the elaborate backdrop, thereby displacing an exclusive focus on Salome in the foreground of the painting.

⁶³ The most important influence on Moreau may have been the archaeological prints he examined in the Print Room of the Louvre, and in such popular journals as the Magasin pittoresque (Mathieu, 122).

Moreau endows Salome with Eastern symbols that emphasize her Oriental lineage. She holds an ancient Indian symbol of the lotus, denoting sensual pleasure, and wears a bracelet with the magic Ujat eye of Egypt and India. Other components of an Eastern theme occur in the background as well. To the right side lies a black panther, an animal believed to lure men, beasts, and cattle with its sweet breath.⁶⁴ In addition, an image of a man being clutched by a sphinx is seen on the pedestal panel to the far left. By representing her domination over men through foreign symbols, the world of the "other" provided Moreau with the supernatural qualities of her implied sexual power.

Moreau uses exotic symbols to present woman as a potential menace, but not as a direct threat immediately endangering the lives of men. His Salome belongs to a different milieu, one that was safely distanced from Western reality and maintained in the realm of history and fantasy. While artists such as Corinth and Pell depicted Salome as a Western woman, her menacing position intensified without the need for exotic symbols to emphasize an animalistic, seductive nature. Their fair-skinned Salomes would have been interpreted as threatening by the Western look of their bodies. Elaborate foreign references were not necessary to communicate Salome's iniquity; the viewer would have recognized her Western appearance as a threat in itself.

⁶⁴ Kaplan, 65-66.

Salome symbolized the ambiguous woman in society who provided sexual pleasure to men while jeopardizing existing establishments of patriarchal authority.

In their depictions of Salome's body as the racial "other," Regnault and Moreau present their own distinct means of enticing the viewer. Although Moreau may compare Salome to evil sexual symbols such as the black panther and the sphinx, the viewer does not witness the actual assertion of her female sensuality. In contrast to Regnault, Moreau does not paint a voluptuous Salome. While the viewer of Regnault's Salomé may have been tantalized by her sexuality, the spectator of Moreau's painting is seduced by the exotic symbolism and the heavily encrusted architectural setting. Moreau averts the sexual delectation of Salome's femininity by imposing his knowledge of exotic decoration onto her physique. Ornament displaces Salome's bodily power as Moreau transfers power to himself by flaunting his decorative achievements. An ink study for the painting illustrates the profusion of embellishments that conceal Salome's anatomy (Fig. 16). By portraying Salome as the "other," Regnault justifies his depiction of an erotic, sensual woman, and Moreau uses the opportunity to demonstrate his knowledge of foreign archaeology and Oriental subject matter.

In Salome Dancing Before Herod, Moreau downplays the feminine characteristics of Salome's body while insinuating her sexual power. In other depictions of Salome by Moreau, her gender traits become even less apparent

as Salome demonstrates her domination over the head of St. John the Baptist. Moreau's painting, The Apparition, illustrates the decapitated head of St. John floating in front of Salome (Fig. 17). Her pointing gesture seems to represent her ability to control and manipulate the head. Instead of representing Salome with downcast eyes as in the previous painting, here Moreau depicts Salome focusing ardently upon the bloody object. While the artist intensifies Salome's commanding presence in The Apparition, Moreau downplays her femininity. Only the slight revelation of breasts and absence of facial hair assist the viewer in determining her gender. By reversing representations of female sexual power by such artists as Corinth and Regnault, Moreau associates masculinity with control and domination. This would appeal to members of the Salon (Moreau's primary audience) who felt threatened by the assertion of women's rights in society. It may also have had a hidden signification for Moreau's own viewing pleasure, as present-day art historians have often claimed that he was homosexual.⁶⁵

Almost twenty years after the exhibition of Moreau's paintings in the Salon, a more forceful transference of gender identity occurs with the French publication of Oscar Wilde's Salome in 1893. More than any other work, Wilde's one-act play crystallized the public's obsession with the theme of Salome in the late nineteenth century. The warm colors and exotic setting of

⁶⁵ Virginia Allen states that any evidence pertaining to Moreau's homosexuality was well-guarded during his lifetime (Allen, 166).

Moreau's paintings provided an important antecedent for Wilde's Salome. Wilde conceived a synaesthetic theatrical experience that would appeal to the aural, olfactory, and visual senses; he wanted Salome's words to be heard as "music."⁶⁶ He imagined the effect of perfume braziers that would release "scented clouds rising and partly veiling the stage from time to time...a new perfume for each emotion."⁶⁷ Wilde paints the background scene as vividly as Moreau, yet the physical body of Salome is consistently referred to as "pale" and "white": "She is like the shadow of a white rose in a mirror of silver;"⁶⁸ "How pale she is!"⁶⁹ Wilde frequently associates distinguishing traits of Salome with conventional iconography, but he reverses their usual meaning. For example, the dove is the customary icon of grace, vulnerability, and spirituality. Wilde alters the orthodox signification of an innocent, pure dove by defining Salome as a "dove that has strayed."⁷⁰ In his words, Wilde creates a character similar to Corinth's Salome. Both men invented despicable women of ill repute who hide behind a seemingly innocent facade, but have passions that prove to be fatal.

⁶⁶ Condon and Maschio, 7.

⁶⁷ Cited by Bird, 60.

⁶⁸ Wilde, 2.

⁶⁹ Wilde, 9.

⁷⁰ Wilde, 10.

These hidden reversals of interpretation often allow access for different members of society. In uncovering Wilde's multivalent constructions, the play surfaces as both a representation and a refutation of the hegemonic patriarchy. On one level, Salome is a destructive force to the heterosexual majority, but the play also reflects Wilde's familiarity with alternative sexualities.⁷¹ On occasion, Wilde suspends the prevailing hegemonic discourse to provide entry for the homosexual viewer. In Salome's speech to the young Syrian, Wilde alludes to the fin-de-siècle symbol of homosexuality, the green carnation: "thou wilt do this thing for me...I will let fall for thee a little flower, a little green flower."⁷² Wilde also makes repeated reference to Salome as the "daughter of Sodom."⁷³ This appellation may suggest the type of activity implied by the word "sodom" that was codified by the Labouchere Amendment of 1885 prohibiting sodomy.⁷⁴

Aubrey Beardsley's illustrations for the play's 1894 English edition revealed Wilde's use of such multiple references. Instead of concealing homosexual allusions, Beardsley boldly treated the alternative sexualities implicit in Wilde's text. Beardsley must have carefully noted Wilde's sudden

⁷¹ Condon and Maschio, 1.

⁷² Wilde, 16.

⁷³ Wilde, 21, 23, 24.

⁷⁴ Condon and Maschio, 16.

reversals of meaning. When Wilde confers power on Salome, the erotic focus of the play shifts from Salome to John the Baptist. She remains the fervent speaker, but the Baptist is the object of her desire:⁷⁵

It is thy mouth that I desire, Iokanaan....The pomegranate flowers that blossom in the gardens of Tyre, and are redder than roses, are not so red. The red blasts of trumpets that herald the approach of kings, and make afraid the enemy, are not so red....It is redder than the feet of him who cometh from a forest where he hath slain a lion, and seen gilded tigers. Thy mouth is like a branch of coral that fishers have found in the twilight of the sea, the coral that they keep for the kings! There is nothing in the world so red as thy mouth....Suffer me to kiss thy mouth.⁷⁶

Because sexual power falls in the hands of a woman, Beardsley inverts her gender and Salome becomes a man. In Beardsley's drawing for the climactic moment of the play, Salome is masculine and John the Baptist is feminine (Fig. 18). Details confirm the sexual transfer. Small black dots on Salome's face connote a beard while St. John's face is smooth.⁷⁷ Beardsley associates the Prophet with feminine attributes. The Virgin Mary's symbol of purity, the lily, grows from a puddle of blood next to a drooping leaf. A third lily leaf turns into a candle cut off from the flame, alluding to the Prophet's death.⁷⁸ Salome's hair is prickly and rough, and John's hair resembles the

⁷⁵ Condon and Maschio, 5. Wilde referred to the Prophet as "Iokanaan."

⁷⁶ Wilde, 23-24.

⁷⁷ These dots appear on other sexually ambiguous illustrations. By deliberately marring the cleanliness of his line, Beardsley may be suggesting that nothing is pure, clear, unalloyed, or unequivocal (Snodgrass, 33).

⁷⁸ Heyd, 103.

snaky locks of Medusa. According to Freud, Medusa's tresses represented the female genitals and the masculine horror of castration-decapitation.⁷⁹

Beardsley dramatizes the image by including an excerpt from Wilde's passionate scene:

Ah! I have kissed thy mouth, Iokanaan, I have kissed thy mouth. There was a bitter taste on thy lips. Was it the taste of blood?...Nay; but perchance it was the taste of love....They say that love hath a bitter taste....But what matter? I have kissed thy mouth, Iokanaan, I have kissed thy mouth.⁸⁰

Beardsley's image of Salome as a man would appeal to the homosexual subculture of which both Wilde and Beardsley were prominent members. In order for his play to be produced and receive critical attention, Wilde had to create a work that did not openly challenge the dominant values of the hegemonic society. Wilde intended his play to be seen by an elite group of aesthetes and intellectuals who were part of the Symbolist movement in Paris.⁸¹ The challenge faced by Wilde and Beardsley was to create imagery and text that would appear to follow the prevailing order of society, yet could also be interpreted as a contradiction of those standards. Salome's masculinity and John the Baptist's femininity may have been accepted by the heterosexual viewer who interpreted the sexual transfer through gender constructions of women's behavior.

⁷⁹ Fletcher, 92-93.

⁸⁰ Wilde, 66-67.

⁸¹ Condon and Maschio, 3, 13.

The assertion of women's individuality and power intimidated many men of the late nineteenth century. In 1900, the German neurologist P.J. Möbius declared that women should be denied access to higher education because it would turn them into "modern fools," endowing them with false masculine characteristics that they would use to seek power over men while being poor mothers. He stated in his book Concerning the Physiological Feeble-mindedness of the Female, "The children of the dominating woman are sickly and deprived of mother's milk."⁸² Möbius feared the strength of an independent woman of the type Salome characterized. He postulated "were the female not bodily and spiritually weak, were it not as a rule made unharmed by circumstances, then it would be most dangerous."⁸³ With the advance of women's rights and increasing educational opportunities, Möbius and many of his contemporaries believed the threat of women resulted in the transference of gender traits:

If the female fails at the duty of being a mate, if it yearns to "live life to the full," then it is cursed with chronic ill health. Sadly, the man and posterity are simultaneously punished....a people finally becomes so civilized that it can no longer survive, and only the blood of barbarians refreshes it again. Obviously, the primal phenomenon is the antithesis between mental activity and procreation....People active primarily mentally are nervous, and their offspring are even more nervous. An essential hallmark of this form of degeneracy is the effacing of sexual characteristics: effeminate men and manly women. The more nervous a

⁸² Cited by Heller, 10.

⁸³ Cited by Heller, 10.

population is, the more common are girls with talent and generally male spiritual characteristics.⁸⁴

"Manly women" were those who combined women's sensuality with men's intellectual capacities in a dysfunctional union that could only lead to death. It meant death for men, for children born weak and deprived of mother's milk, for civilization, and ultimately for woman herself. At the turn of the century, those considered "women" were subservient wives and slavishly attentive mothers while "modern women" were educated, unnatural, unable to support new life and in their unproductive sensuality only heralds of death.⁸⁵ Thus women were fated either to be "modern" or "traditional." The only acceptable way for a woman to justify her sexuality and find contentment was through child-bearing.

The Salome of Wilde and Beardsley symbolizes the non-maternal woman who uses her sensuality to bring about the death of the precursor of Christ. When Herod declares Salome's death at the end of Wilde's play, Beardsley eliminates her masculine characteristics. As the *cul-de-lampe* illustrates, once Salome has been killed and no longer presents a threat, her femininity is restored (Fig. 19). Despite her sensual power, Salome mirrors the fate of how late nineteenth-century women were interpreted: because she fails to achieve her natural role as mother, she can only generate death,

⁸⁴ Cited by Heller, 11.

⁸⁵ Heller, 11.

including her own. Endowed by Wilde and Beardsley with masculine attributes, Salome instantly represents the independent "modern woman" because no "proper woman" at the turn of the century would even consider obtaining freedom from dependency on men.⁸⁶ Corinth provided a similar rendition of Salome as a self-assertive woman, yet he painted his image for the Munich Secession exhibition thus ensuring viewers who were predominantly male and heterosexual. His emphasis on Salome's feminine sexuality may derive from a scopophilic proclivity as well as the anticipation of his audience's profile.

The portrayal of Salome may be an accurate representation of how men understood women either consciously or unconsciously in the late nineteenth century. The masculinization of Salome through imagery and text ultimately would not disrupt the hegemonic values that Wilde needed to preserve for the sake of his reputation and that of the play. Wilde's textual strategy allowed him to placate heterosexual spectators while offering points of entry for his own homosexual circle. The inclusion of both races and genders prohibits a definite categorization of Wilde's and Beardsley's Salome as "us" or "them." Their ability to provide concealed interpretations challenges the viewer's perceptions derived from other representations of Salome.

⁸⁶ Allen, 193.

Throughout the centuries, Salome's innocent biblical origins evolved into ambiguous visual portrayals functioning as paradigms for an artist's aesthetic impulse, social agenda, intended audience, or sexual preference. As Wilde himself said, "A Truth in art is that whose contradictory is also true."⁸⁷ The contradictions of Salome's race and gender focus attention on the presumed nature of women as vehicles of sensual pleasure or agents of violent death. Artists promoted this dichotomy to heterosexual spectators by often displaying voluptuous flesh with visual codes of destruction such as knives and decapitated heads. Whether she was westernized or orientalized, Salome symbolized the assertive capabilities of women who carried a threat to male legitimism of power. To a homosexual audience, this power forced Salome to deny her own femininity. Salome's masculinized appearance by Moreau and Beardsley corresponds to the public's perception of independent women as "manly" by such medical experts as Möbius. The hegemonic rejection of modern women's sexual identity ensured gender subjugation and the preservation of patriarchal establishments that women struggled to overcome.

⁸⁷ Cited by Clements, 141.

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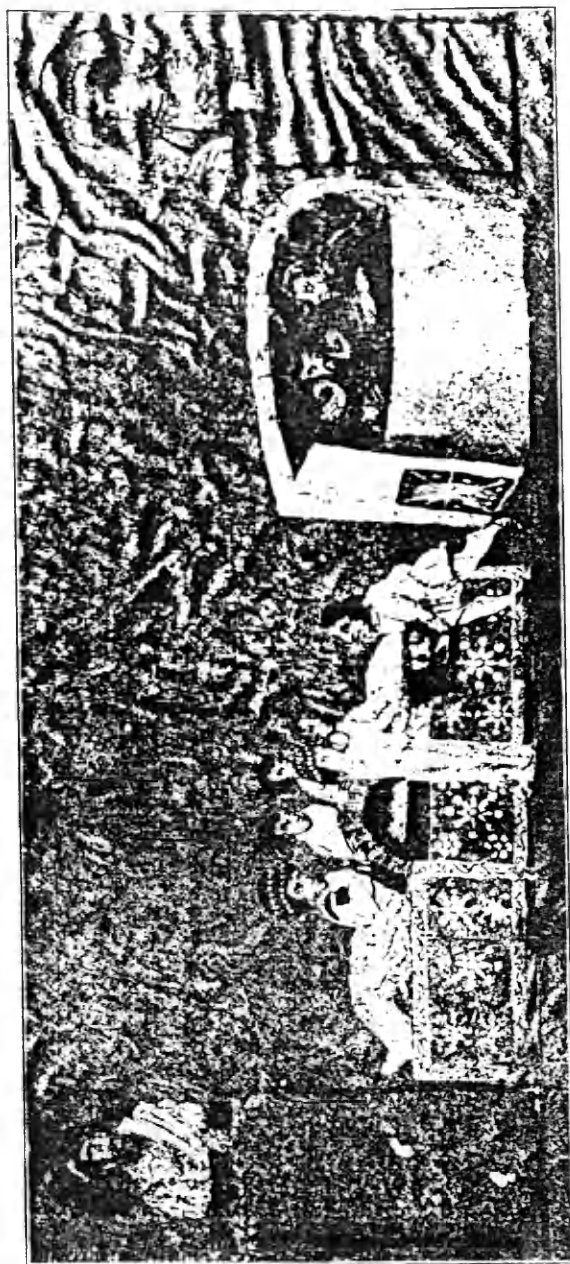


Figure 1:
Greek manuscript, sixth century

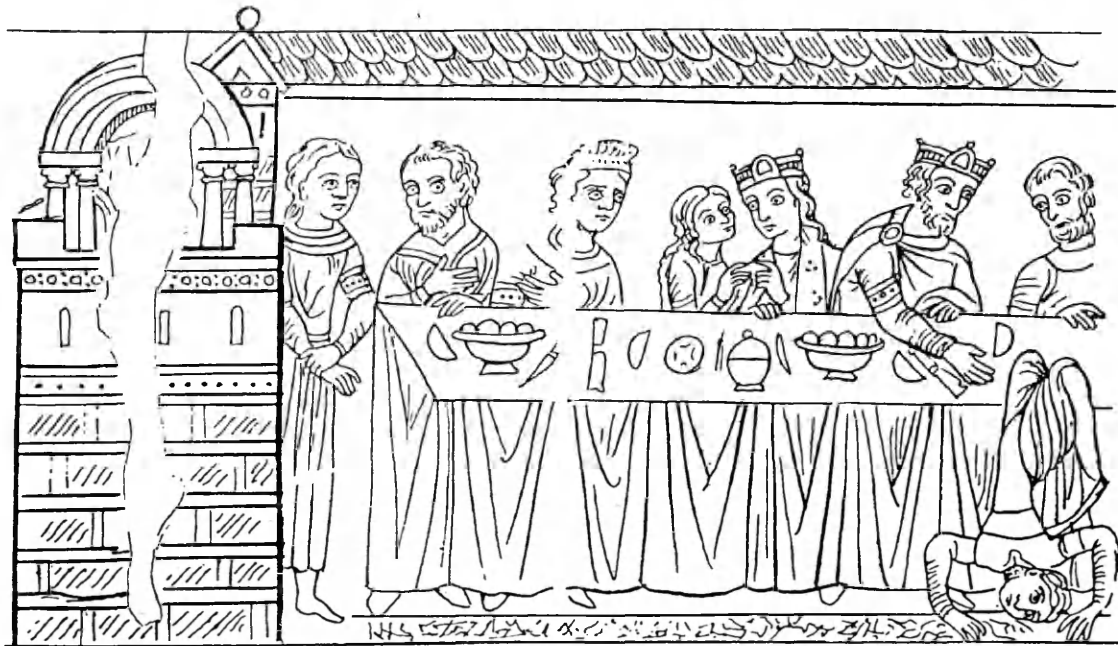


Figure 2:
Herrade of Landsberg, Hortus deliciarum, late twelfth century

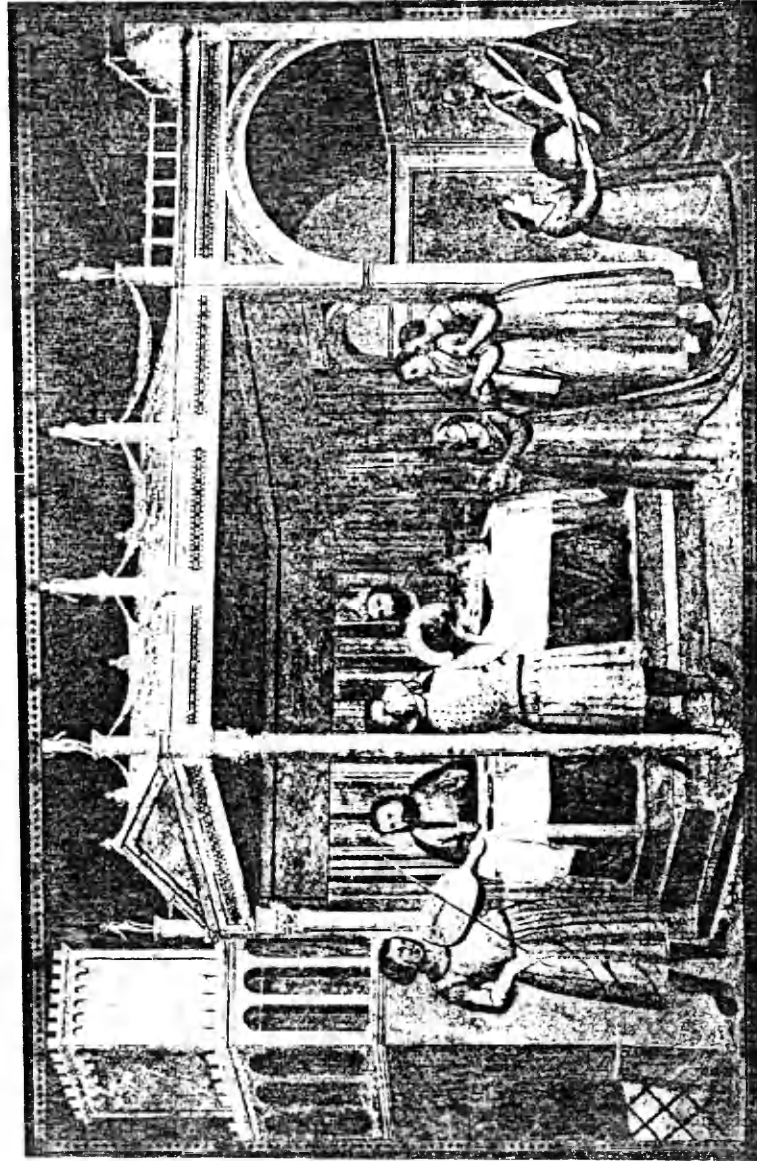


Figure 3:
Giotto, The Feast of Herod, ca. 1325

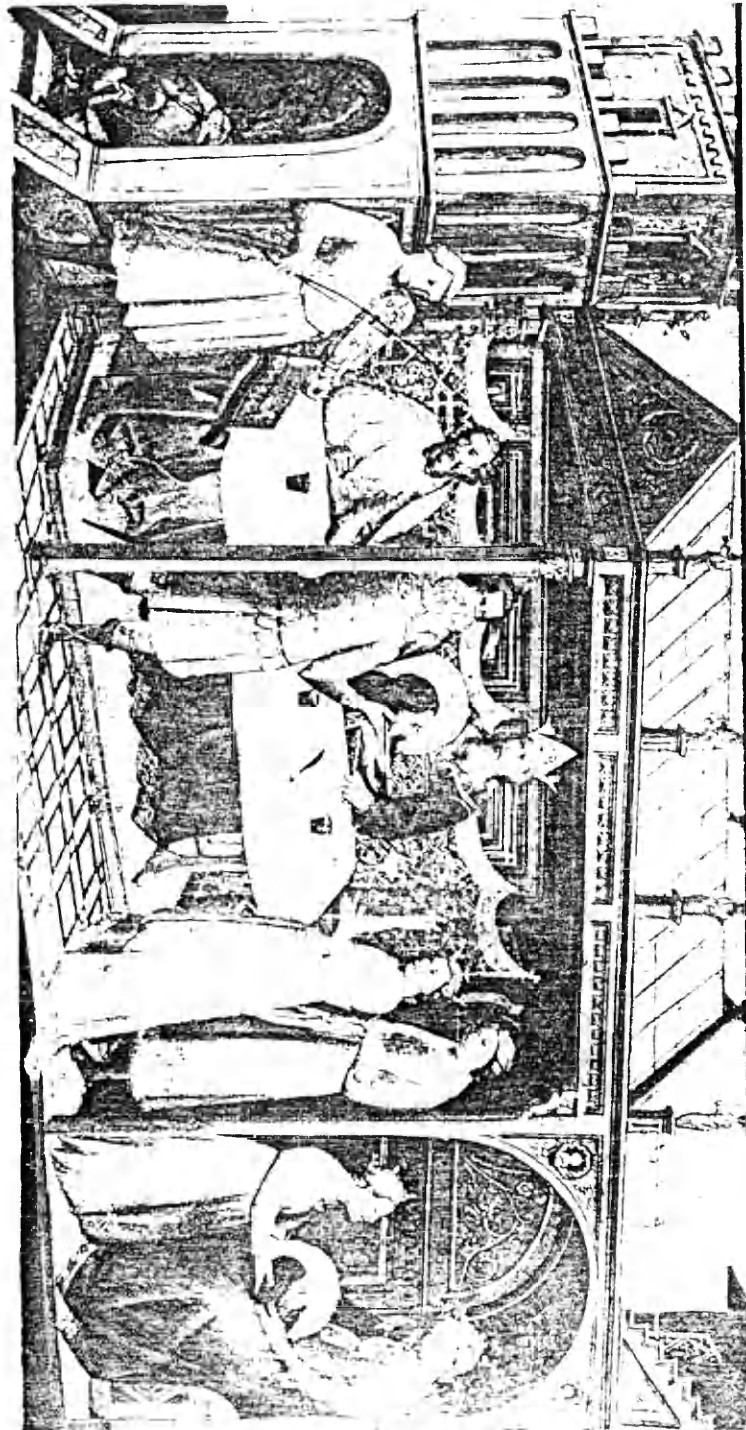


Figure 4:
Agnolo Gaddi, The Feast of Herod, ca. 1388



Figure 5:
Donatello, The Feast of Herod, 1423-1427



Figure 6:
Andrea Solario, Salome Receiving the Head of the Baptist, ca. 1507



Figure 7:
Sebastiano del Piombo, Salome, 1510



Figure 8:
Lucas van Leyden, Herod and Herodias, ca. 1512



Figure 9:
Hans Baldung Grien, Salome, ca. 1511-1512



Figure 10:
Israhel van Meckenem, The Dance at the Court of Herod, ca. 1500



Figure 11:
Andrea Solario, Head of St. John the Baptist, 1507



Figure 12:
Lovis Corinth, Salomé, 1899



Figure 13:
Ella Ferris Pell, Salome, 1890



Figure 14:
Henri Regnault, Salomé, 1870



Figure 15:
Gustave Moreau, Salome Dancing Before Herod, 1876



Figure 16:
Gustave Moreau, ink study for Salome Dancing Before Herod, ca. 1876

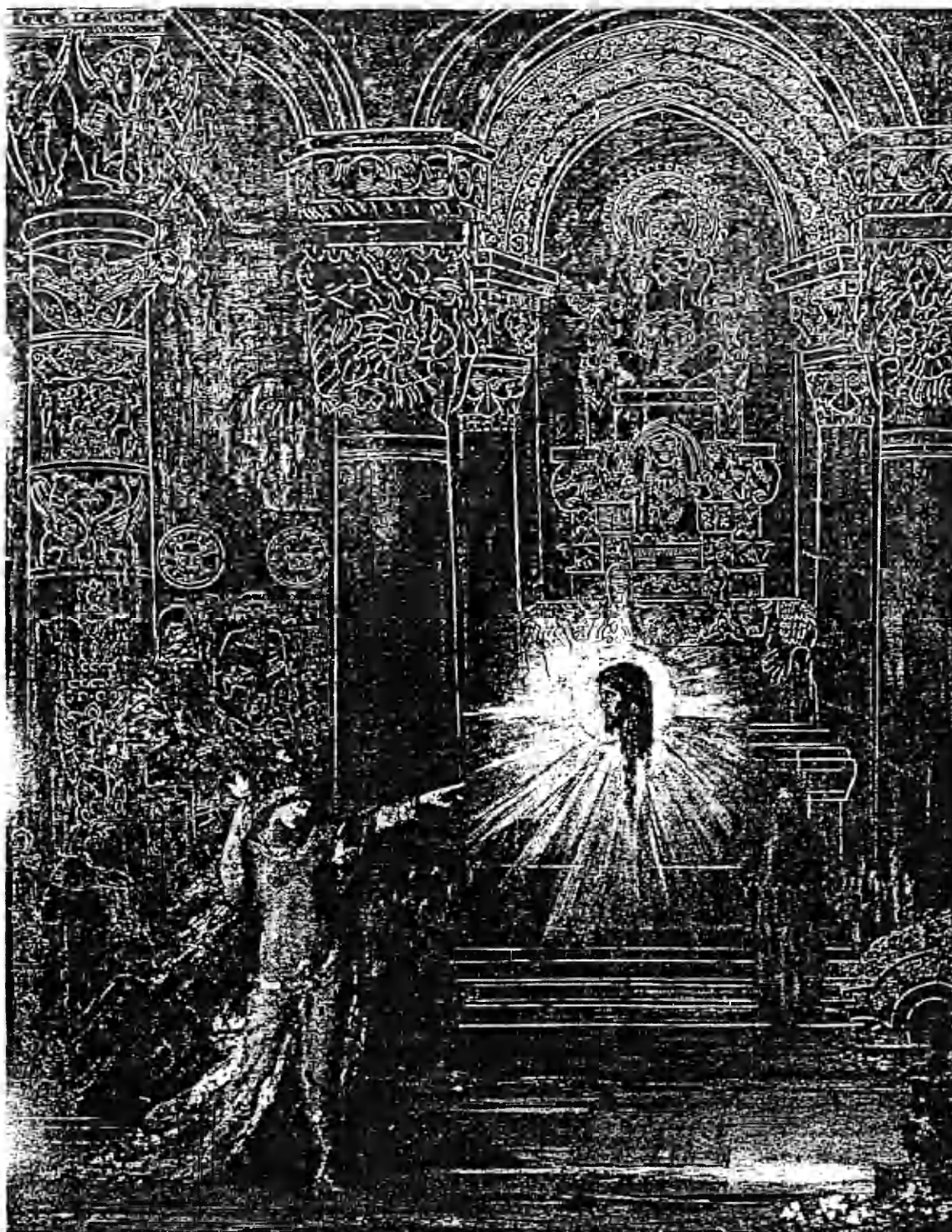


Figure 17:
Gustave Moreau, The Apparition, ca. 1876



Figure 18:
Aubrey Beardsley, The Climax, 1894



Figure 19:
Aubrey Beardsley, The Burial of Salome, 1894