

AUBREY
BEARDSLEY,
SALOME
AND
SATIRE



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Abstract

This thesis proposes that the illustrations produced by Aubrey Beardsley for the first English edition of Oscar Wilde's play *Salomé* are primarily motivated by a strong satirical agenda. Whilst it has usually been acknowledged that this group of illustrations harbours some satirical elements, these have never before been regarded as anything other than isolated occurrences.

The iconography of Beardsley's *Salomé* illustrations has rarely been subjected to close visual analysis or lengthy explication. All early studies of Beardsley's work and the pioneering and monumental cataloguing work carried out in the 1960s inevitably contain a number of misconstructions and lacunae. Recent critical accounts of the *Salomé* illustrations, mostly theory-led and written from outside the discipline of art history, have on the one hand relied upon these interpretations, yet have on the other hand espoused various degrees of epistemological scepticism and historical relativism not calculated to provide new interpretations of these images in the light of their historical contexts. Countering this tendency, this thesis sets out to establish these contexts and to identify and explain the jokes which run throughout this sequence of illustrations.

As a preliminary step to this analysis, my first chapter narrates a production history of the illustrations, and unravels the complex sequence of events relating to the commission. A second chapter surveys late nineteenth-century conventions of satire and literary and visual caricatures of Beardsley's principal target, Wilde. Following this, the body of the thesis is devoted to a detailed account of each image. These accounts explore the range of meanings at work within a broad context of contemporary visual culture, and offer a radical reinterpretation of the *Salomé* illustrations.

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Introduction

Oscar Wilde's play *Salomé* was the most infamous illustrated book of the 1890s. Published in early 1894, when Wilde was at the height of his fame and Aubrey Beardsley was an ambitious but little known illustrator of 21, the book created a sensation.¹ Beardsley's illustrations challenged textual authority and operated with a degree of autonomy which was untenable in terms of the institutional and discursive hierarchies of the time.

Recognition of the strength of this challenge is apparent in the immediate critical response to the book's publication.² The first edition of Wilde's play, written in French, had been published in Paris in February of the previous year, and had attracted many reviews; in this first issue of the English translation of the text Beardsley's illustrations became the principal object of critical attention. The book was widely reviewed, and the language used is illuminating about the problematic nature of the illustrations. To take an instance from each end of the scale from the conservative to the liberal press, *The Times*, in a curt notice which deals with both the illustrations and the text of *Salomé*, bluntly comments of Beardsley's images: 'we hardly know what to say of them.'³ The review goes on to state that the illustrations are 'unintelligible for the most part, and, so far as they are intelligible, repulsive.' *The Times* firmly places the illustrations outside the realm of rational critical analysis; unintelligibility and repulsiveness are equally good reasons to avoid any close critical contact: the images are dismissed summarily for the former and shunned for the latter. Yet in a curiously similar vein, Theodore Wratislaw, in a long and largely sympathetic review of *Salomé* in the *Artist and Journal of Home Culture*, ascribes 'extreme limits of insanity and unhealthiness' to the illustrations.⁴

¹ Beardsley's work had been brought to the public attention for the first time in April 1893, when the art critic Joseph Pennell published an article, 'A New Illustrator: Aubrey Beardsley', in *The Studio*, 1 (1893), 14-19.

² The critical reception of Beardsley's work is discussed in depth by Jane Haville Desmarais in *The Beardsley Industry: the Critical Reception in England and France 1893-1914* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998).

³ *The Times*, 8 March 1894, p. 12.

⁴ 'The Salomé of Aubrey Beardsley', *Artist and Journal of Home Culture*, 15 (1894), 100-101. The *Artist and Journal of Home Culture* was a monthly magazine which until Wilde's trial in 1895 was generally supportive of decadent authors and was prepared to publish homoerotic literature. A homoerotic sonnet by Wratislaw is published in the *Artist*, 14 (1893), 229. The sonnet ends 'Ah let me in thy bosom still enjoy / Oblivion of the past, divinest boy, / And the dull ennui of a woman's kiss!'

Later criticism reiterates this preoccupation with the unseemliness of Beardsley's illustrations; in 1913 Holbrook Jackson remarks that Beardsley's art is 'inappropriate, sometimes even impertinent',⁵ and in 1948 R.A. Walker, writing about the illustrations to *Salomé*, comments: 'never had a book been so illustrated with such irreverent and irrational drawings.'⁶

The strength of the language here is striking, as is the coincidence of terminology. It must be significant that such a high proportion of the terms employed across the board are negatives: *insane*, *unintelligible*, *unhealthy*, *inappropriate*, *impertinent*, *irreverent*, *irrational*. This narrative of ineffability suggests that the illustrations were somehow outside discursive conventions, both for conservative and for liberal readers; they could only be defined in terms of what they were not.

A crucial point which might go some way towards explaining this, which I will go on to address in chapter II, is that in the 1890s book illustration had a specific set of functions to perform, and Beardsley's illustrations clearly did not perform these functions or even transgress from them in readily recognisable ways.⁷ If we approach *Salomé* expecting the images to operate as conventional illustrations, then we still find - to paraphrase Tom Stoppard and update the *Times* reviewer - that half the time they mean something else, and the other half they mean nothing at all.⁸ Either the iconography of the illustrations was not understood because of the context, or if it was comprehended, then for reasons of propriety it was unspeakable within a public arena.

Following a long period of relative neglect - Kenneth Clark remarks that in 1965 'the name of Beardsley was almost completely forgotten'⁹ - academic interest in his work was stimulated by Brian Reade's monographic exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1966-67, and by his *cataloguerai sonné* of 1967. Reade presents the first analytical study of the illustrations, and without struggling to

⁵ Holbrook Jackson, *The Eighteen Nineties: A Review of Art and Ideas at the Close of the Nineteenth Century* (London: Grant Richards, 1913), p. 124.

⁶ R.A. Walker, *The Best of Beardsley* (London: Spring Books, 1948), p. 4.

⁷ Transgressions were common. Almost every history or manual of book illustration published in the 1890s includes instances of illustrative transgressions and of conflict between author and illustrator. See for example George Somes Layard, *Tennyson and his Pre-Raphaelite Illustrators: A Book About a Book* (London: Elliot Stock, 1894), pp. 6-10; A. Horsley Hinton, *A Handbook of Illustration* (London: Dawbarn and Ward, 1894), pp. 20-22; Walter Crane, *Of the Decorative Illustration of Books Old and New* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1896), p. 150; Henry Blackburn, *The Art of Illustration* (London: W.H. Allen, 1894), pp. 211-12.

⁸ 'Half of what he said meant something else, and the other half didn't mean anything at all.' Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* (London: Faber & Faber, 1967), p. 40. Rosencrantz is, of course, referring to Hamlet.

⁹ Kenneth Clark, *The Best of Aubrey Beardsley* (London: John Murray, 1979), p. 7.

match images to the texts which they purport to illustrate he treats them largely as autonomous images and briefly explains their iconography. He liberates analysis from its preoccupation with the issues of morality and appropriateness which had marked - and stymied - it to this point. Clark emphasises the pioneering quality of Reade's work when he writes 'Mr. Reade brought to the study of Beardsley a thoroughness and breadth of knowledge hitherto undreamed of...'¹⁰

Since the late 1960s the literature on Beardsley has grown enormously, gathering momentum particularly for the centenary of his death in 1998. Four biographies, Stanley Weintraub's *Beardsley: A Biography* of 1967 (published in a revised edition of 1976 as *Aubrey Beardsley: Imp of the Perverse*); Miriam Benkovitz's *Aubrey Beardsley: An Account of his Life* of 1981; and Matthew Sturgis's *Aubrey Beardsley: A Biography* and Stephen Calloway's *Aubrey Beardsley*, both published to coincide with the centenary of 1998, have all made large contributions to our knowledge of Beardsley's life.¹¹

Articles published by Elliot L. Gilbert in 1983, and by Jeffrey Wallen in 1992, mark a significant shift in critical approach to Beardsley, as both examine the interface of text and illustration in *Salomé*.¹² This interdisciplinary approach has prompted both writers to explore similarities in Beardsley's and Wilde's treatments of the *Salomé* story which had until then been denied. Gilbert's article proposes that, rather than being seriously at odds with one another, the illustrations and the text share a 'single strong focus', and Wallen is primarily interested in the theme of desire expounded both by Wilde and by Beardsley in *Salomé*, and in how desire is expressed and revealed both by text and illustration.¹³ Both these articles offer valuable new perspectives on the complex exchanges and congruencies at work in *Salomé*, and both present strong challenges to the prevailing idea of the otherness and ineffability of the images. However, neither Gilbert nor Wallen attempt to analyse the details of these images using art historical tools, and as a result they take at face value general themes without looking at the more subtle ways in which the illustrations equivocate.

Most of the recent interpretative work to have been carried out on Beardsley's illustrations is informed by post-structuralist and deconstructionist

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ The principal books published around 1998 are summarized by Margaret Stetz and Mark Samuels Lasner in 'Aubrey Beardsley in the 1990s', *Victorian Studies*, 42 (1999/2000), 289-302.

¹² Elliot L. Gilbert, "'Tumult of Images": Wilde, Beardsley and *Salomé*', *Victorian Studies*, 26 (1983), 133-159; Jeffrey Wallen, 'Illustrating *Salomé*: Perverting the Text?', *Word & Image*, 8 (1992), 124-132.

¹³ Gilbert, 133.

theory, approaches which have often been illuminating about how the illustrations create meanings which are evasive and plural, and by feminist theory. The leaders in these fields are respectively Chris Snodgrass and Linda Gertner Zatin. For Snodgrass the ‘unhinging of hermeneutic certainty’ practised by the illustrations is the principal issue at stake,¹⁴ and for Zatin it is their open defiance of Victorian sexual conventions.¹⁵ In confronting the earlier critical insistence upon ineffability, and identifying the aspects of Beardsley’s images which were intractably problematic for a contemporary audience, these readings have re-presented Beardsley’s *Salomé* illustrations as images which challenged established modes of meaning in some specific ways, as Snodgrass puts it, ‘ripping the culture’s suturing, through a “dis-placing” (and de-forming) deconstruction of its own conventions.’¹⁶

Yet there is still an underlying recognition that some aspects of the illustrations’ meanings remain undiscovered. In insisting upon the fluctuation and hall-of-mirrors style multiplication of meaning, where no one sense is privileged over another, Snodgrass effectively evades the necessity of proposing positive identifications of Beardsley’s complex iconography. Zatin’s revisionist theory-led account is partial, and only deals with aspects of illustrations which can be seen to support her case. That these accounts are dogged by a suppressed anxiety about the problematic qualities of the *Salomé* images is demonstrated by both writers’ surprising reliance upon Reade’s interpretations, which are often repeated as though they are unassailable fact. Unfortunately Reade sometimes made mistakes, and these misreadings have been perpetuated.

One of the most recent critical accounts of Beardsley’s work is informed by deconstructionist theory. Nicholas Frankel returns to the central problem of ineffability, refashioning it as a virtue, when he argues that the illustrations are ‘dead letter’, or ‘signs drained of content’. He asserts that Beardsley’s illustrations for *Salomé*

tease us with the prospect that they contain dangerous and perverse meanings, if only by the sheer profusion of undraped body parts and sex organs dispersed throughout. Of course, these breasts, bellies, and penises

¹⁴ Chris Snodgrass, *Aubrey Beardsley: Dandy of the Grotesque* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 293. See also Chris Snodgrass, ‘Beardsley’s Oscillating Spaces: Play, Paradox and the Grotesque’, in *Reconsidering Aubrey Beardsley*, ed. by Robert Langenfeld (London: U.M.I. Research Press, 1989), pp.19-52.

¹⁵ Linda Gertner Zatin, *Aubrey Beardsley and Victorian Sexual Politics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).

¹⁶ Snodgrass, *Aubrey Beardsley*, p. 294.

are signs drained of content - they are simply breasts, bellies, and penises. Just when we think we glimpse the truths at which they hint, their "signifieds" seem to collapse into their "signifiers," as if in a state of perpetual convertibility. They cannot really be described as working to *produce* certain "hidden" meanings, therefore; it would be far more accurate to say that Beardsley's drawings seduce meaning, draining it away from the sign, so that finally what you see is what you get.'¹⁷

In his chapter on *Salomé* he goes further than Snodgrass's insistence upon multiple, unstable meanings, and seeks to discredit any attempt by scholars to find iconographic meaning in the images beyond the dead-letter materiality of printed lines: 'in searching for a deeper, less contradictory *Salomé*, the truth-tellers risk losing their heads.'¹⁸

The epistemological scepticism at the root of this approach is not calculated to provide new interpretations of these images in the light of their historical contexts. I think that there is room for a different kind of analysis to coexist with more modern critical approaches, one which assumes that the images might also operate in relatively conventional ways and which is informed by a close visual analysis of individual works. One of the principal problems is that the images have rarely been subjected to close readings informed by the discipline of art history. As Daniel O. Bell perceptively points out, 'in recent decades, Beardsley's Decadent legend has been kept alive chiefly by literature professors, essayists and cultural historians who have taken the word of Fry and Reade without independently looking at Beardsley's art. Some of these writers have made useful contributions to Beardsley studies, particularly in evaluating his literary efforts. But for those outside the discipline of art to control Beardsley scholarship is as incomprehensible as if a group of art historians were to dominate the study of Yeats.'¹⁹

It is precisely this imbalance of attention which, as an art historian, I attempt to address here. This thesis is written from an art historical perspective, and therein lies its claim to originality. It sets out to fill the gaps left by Reade in his interpretations of the *Salomé* illustrations which have since been left blank, and to do this in a systematic way.

Fundamental questions, which have not been answered by the literary or theoretical approaches promulgated by Gilbert, Wallen, Zatlin, Snodgrass, Frankel

¹⁷ Nicholas Frankel, *Oscar Wilde's Decorated Books* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), p. 73.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 76. We return to Stoppard; Snodgrass thinks the illustrations mean something else, and Frankel thinks they mean nothing at all.

¹⁹ Daniel O. Bell, *A Pious Bacchanal: Affinities Between the Lives and Works of John Flaxman and Aubrey Beardsley* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000), pp. xxxix-xl.

et al. prompted this thesis: since the *Salomé* images were undoubtedly puzzling, were these puzzles solvable? If they did not relate directly to the text of Wilde's play, then might they relate to something else?

In order to explore these questions I have opted to analyse the iconography of this group of images in far greater depth than has hitherto been attempted. Through my research, for which close examination of the images was central, it has become apparent to me that as well as the other ways in which they create meaning, these illustrations have a strong satirical agenda which has never previously been acknowledged, and that an interpretation according to the conventions of this image category casts a significant degree of new light upon them.

Rather than attempting to impose modern critical ideology onto Beardsley's *Salomé* illustrations my approach here is to analyse the images in terms of contemporary visual references and to debunk the prevailing notion of their ineffability. These images have always been reported to be eccentric - beyond the range of critical analysis, outside normal modes of signification. I want to argue here for their centricity, and to demonstrate that the images work in conventional ways which have in recent years been overlooked as a result of the creation of a Beardsley who was deconstructionist or feminist *avant la lettre*.

A point I cannot make strongly enough is that the precise meaning of these illustrations, by which I mean that which Beardsley intended, is discoverable. Beardsley was invariably specific in his imagery, not mysterious or Symbolist; he was no Odilon Redon. The illustrations are full of incident and of precisely delineated things, objects which demand to be analysed separately. As John Gray put it in 1898, 'He detested the vague, the blurred, all that is mysterious.'²⁰

Another point which must be addressed is that the illustrations for *Salomé* were made with a small specific audience in mind, and that this audience was largely constituted by friends and acquaintances of Beardsley's and of Wilde's. The small extent of the audience is reflected by the size of the edition; like all Bodley Head books, *Salomé* had a small print run, in this case only 500 copies. It has been my approach to use what it has been possible to discover about Beardsley's projected audience in order to establish some sort of sounding board for my interpretations of the images, in terms of allusions which would have been understood by this group and in terms of how Wilde was regarded at this point in the early 1890s.

²⁰ *Revue blanche*, 16 (May 1898), 68-70; translated as John Gray, *Aubrey Beardsley: An Obituary Memoir* (Edinburgh: Tragara Press, 1980).

I do not claim to have ‘got’ all Beardsley’s visual jokes; there may be some I have missed, others which I have overstated. Yet systematically mapping recurrent satiric devices has proved to be a fruitful enterprise, and I hope that my interpretations will provide a useful new vantage point for other students and scholars working on Beardsley’s illustrations.

The first step in my project of rehabilitating Beardsley within a social and historical context which has often been overlooked is to establish a detailed production history of the *Salomé* illustrations, a narrative which has not previously been constructed in detail.²¹ This is the content of chapter I, ‘A Veritable Fronde’: the Production History of Beardsley’s *Salomé* Illustrations. My second chapter, ‘The Head of Oscar the Poëtast on a charger’: Beardsley’s Satirical Context considers the notion of satire, looking at its modes of operation, and establishing a historical context - with particular reference to representations of Wilde - within which I believe Beardsley to have been working. The third and longest chapter, ‘Under the Microscope, Sideways and Upside Down’: the *Salomé* Illustrations, is divided into sections, each of which is devoted to a close reading of a single image. Drawing on the contextual material broached in chapter II, my discussion here will consider specific satirical instances as they appear, demonstrate how a number of themes and targets recur, and argue that the *Salomé* illustrations constitute a sustained satirical sequence.

²¹ I gave a version of this chapter, “‘A Veritable Fronde’: the Production of Beardsley’s *Salomé* Pictures’ as a paper on November 6th 1998 at the conference ‘Aubrey Beardsley - Myth and Reality’ held at the Victoria and Albert Museum to coincide with the exhibition *Aubrey Beardsley*. Two years later Linda Zatlin published an article on the same subject, ‘Wilde, Beardsley and the Making of *Salomé*’, *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 5 (2000), 341-357. Zatlin’s article does not go into all the details of the production history, however, and the material presented in this chapter is original.

Chapter I

‘A Veritable Fronde’: the Production History of Beardsley’s *Salomé* Illustrations

In his letters Beardsley habitually presented complex events briefly, elegantly, and with studied unconcern. Lengthy and complex negotiations would be conflated and alluded to in a well-turned phrase. Beardsley adopted this epistolary style at the beginning of 1893, shortly before his work on the *Salomé* commission, when his erstwhile schoolboy enthusiasm gave way to a greater degree of elegance, punctuated by archaisms and French terms.

This increases the difficulties of piecing together the specific sequence of events surrounding the complicated production history of *Salomé*. There is no formal source of evidence for the negotiations which took place, as they were probably not recorded at all. Certainly none is preserved in the Bodley Head archives. As a result Beardsley’s correspondence is the main source we have of the unfolding events. The specific problems of teasing out narratives from his peculiarly gnomic descriptions are only amplified versions of the obvious problems which attend the use of personal letters as historically accurate documents. We cannot expect letters to perform coherently in this way. Gaps, exaggerations, omissions, allusions which are incomprehensible to us, and changes in tone from one letter to the next brought about by intermediary verbal exchanges are all bewildering. Moreover, the letters which we have survived by chance, and others that we know were written have been lost. In a review of *Last Letters of Aubrey Beardsley* (1904), edited by John Gray, by this time a Catholic priest, in which 162 of the 176 letters are to Beardsley’s Catholic mentor André Raffalovich, Robert Ross commented ‘far more interesting would have been those written to Mr Joseph Pennell, one of the saner influences.’¹ Beardsley’s lost letters to Pennell in 1893 - the two were friends by this time - would surely have contained more detailed information on the progress of the project and on specific drawings.

Nonetheless, despite the problems of having to take an unreliable epistolary source as a starting point, a much fuller reconstruction of events than has hitherto been recorded is achievable. The extant correspondence contains crucial evidence of a sequence of events which has never been plotted before. Whereas one general problematic period has previously been identified, through a close reading of the

¹ Quoted by Stephen Calloway in *Aubrey Beardsley* (London: V&A Publications, 1998), p.162.

letters I have discovered that it is possible to identify three distinct and qualitatively different crisis points in the production of the illustrations. The first occurred in August 1893 when one illustration, the title page design, was rejected by Beardsley's publisher John Lane. The second occurred in September when more drawings had been produced, and Lane appealed to outside sources for advice. The third was in November, when it appears that Wilde himself first saw the illustrations.

Stage One: 'Salomé goes famously'

Wilde's play *Salomé* was written in French late in the Autumn of 1891.² However, the planned dramatic production of the play with Sarah Bernhardt in the title rôle was denied a licence whilst it was in rehearsal in June 1892 by E.F.S. Pigott, the Lord Chamberlain's Examiner of Plays, on the grounds that it represented Biblical characters on stage; in a private letter to a colleague Pigott described the play as 'half Biblical, half pornographic'.³ The play was first published on February 22nd 1893, in French, unillustrated but for a title page design by Félicien Rops, jointly by the Librairie de L'Art Indépendant in Paris and Elkin Mathews and John Lane at the Bodley Head in London.⁴

Beardsley's involvement began shortly after this, in late February or early March of 1893, when he drew 'J'ai Baisé ta Bouche Iokanaan, J'ai Baisé ta Bouche' (figure 73), an uncommissioned drawing in response to the French edition of *Salomé*. This drawing was published in the first number of the *Studio* magazine, which came out on April 1st 1893, where it accompanied Joseph Pennell's laudatory article 'A New Illustrator: Aubrey Beardsley'. Since he made this drawing we might assume that at this stage Beardsley was enthusiastic about the illustrative possibilities of the play, alternatively that he cannily saw an opportunity to raise his status as an illustrator through involvement with one of Wilde's projects, or possibly both. Wilde was certainly enthusiastic about the drawing, which he might have seen in an advance copy of the *Studio* or through the agency

² The history of Wilde's *Salomé* is itself a complex one, although well documented. See *The Letters of Oscar Wilde*, ed. by Rupert Hart-Davis (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1962), pp. 305-306; Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1987), pp. 322-325; William Tydeman and Steven Price, *Wilde: Salomé* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 17.

³ Letter to Spencer Ponsonby of 27 June 1893, quoted in John Russell Stephens, *The Censorship of English Drama 1824-1901* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 112. On Pigott's death George Bernard Shaw described him as 'a walking compendium of vulgar insular prejudice.' (*The Letters of Oscar Wilde*, p. 316.)

⁴ The book was printed in Paris, and Mathews and Lane simply bought copies from Wilde. (*The Letters of Oscar Wilde*, pp. 326-329.)

of a mutual friend, for in March he presented Beardsley with a copy of *Salomé* inscribed 'For Aubrey: for the only artist who, besides myself, knows what the dance of the seven veils is, and can see that invisible dance. Oscar.'⁵

Beardsley had first met Wilde in July 1891 when he had speculatively taken his portfolio to Burne-Jones's studio, and the Wildes were amongst the guests at tea that afternoon.⁶ Beardsley then makes no mention of him until April 20th 1893, when he writes in a postcard to his friend and old housemaster at Brighton Grammar School A. W. King 'I'm off to Paris soon with Oscar Wilde'.⁷ Wilde's presentation of his book to Beardsley perhaps marked Beardsley's entry into his group of friends.

The decision to publish an illustrated English version of *Salomé* by Mathews and Lane was probably made as a result of the publicity garnered by the play's censorship as a stage production and of the critical furore which had attended the publication of the French edition. Lane and Mathews had entered into a publishing partnership in January 1892, and an edition of Wilde's *Poems* (first published in 1882) designed by the illustrator Charles Ricketts had been the first volume issued under their joint imprint. For Wilde's books published by other publishing firms in the early 1890s Ricketts had effectively become Wilde's official illustrator; he had made a cover for the edition of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* published in April 1891 by Ward, Lock, & Co., and designed *Intentions*, *Lord Arthur Saville's Crime and Other Stories* and *A House of Pomegranates* for Osgood, McIlvaine & Co. also in 1891. However, for *Salomé* Lane and Mathews took advantage of the possibility of employing a more controversial illustrator than Ricketts, and considered Beardsley on the strength of the powerful 'J'ai Baisé ta Bouche lokanaan'. Lane certainly exploited the notoriety resulting from the play's censorship from the stage; in a letter from Wilde to Lane of February 1893 Wilde complains of his publisher's sensationalist advertising:

In the advertisement at the end of Mr Symonds's book [*In the Key of Blue and other Essays*, ed. by John Addington Symonds, published by Mathews and Lane in 1893], I observe you state of *Salomé*, "This is the play the Lord Chamberlain refused to licence etc." Please do not do this again. The interest and value of *Salomé* is not that it was suppressed by a foolish official, but that it was written by an artist. It is the tragic beauty of the work

⁵ This copy of the play is held by the Special Collections of the University of London Library.

⁶ *The Letters of Aubrey Beardsley*, ed. by Henry Maas, J.L. Duncan and W.G. Good (London: Cassell, 1970), p. 22.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 47. In the event, however, Beardsley went to Paris in May 1893 with the Pennells.

that makes it valuable and of interest, not a gross act of ignorance and impertinence on the part of the censor.⁸

Beardsley first hinted at the possibility of a commission in a letter to Robert Ross in June 1893, in which he writes: ‘Come and have lunch with me tomorrow Wednesday. If you happen to be near Elkin Mathews *today* they have a drawing (*Salomé*) to show you.’⁹ The only *Salomé* drawing Beardsley had made at this point was that published in the *Studio*. Beardsley’s insistence on ‘*today*’, underlined in the letter, indicates that he must have borrowed the drawing back from the *Studio*, who had bought it outright, in order to show it to Lane and Mathews.

Lane and Mathews decided to employ Beardsley. On August 3 1893 the Bodley Head contract for the English edition of *Salomé* was signed by Wilde and Beardsley. The terms of the contract stated that Beardsley should receive 50 guineas for 10 full page illustrations and a cover design, a large fee for a relatively inexperienced illustrator.¹⁰

At first the commission progressed quickly. In a letter to Ross written around the middle of August Beardsley writes: ‘*Salomé* goes famously. I have done two more since I saw you; one of them, the *Studio* picture redrawn and immensely improved.’¹¹ So at least three of the illustrations have been drawn at this stage, and given the speed at which Beardsley could work, the number is probably higher. Enthusiasm for the project is still apparent here, as he refers to an improvement which ‘The Climax’ (figure 71) makes to the earlier ‘*Studio*’ version of the image.¹²

However, a problem arose late in August 1893 over the title-page drawing (figure 1). The drawing which Beardsley submitted is of a hermaphroditic terminal god, with large and starkly defined genitals. At the foot of the herm is a winged figure, kneeling in prayer. His penis, seen in profile, is semi-erect. Such a depiction of male genitalia, with its suggestion of a potentially sexual ritual on the title page of a book, was clearly unacceptable to a contemporary audience,

⁸ *The Letters of Oscar Wilde*, p. 328.

⁹ *The Letters of Aubrey Beardsley*, pp. 49-50.

¹⁰ See James G. Nelson, *The Early Nineties: A View from the Bodley Head* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), p.97.

¹¹ *The Letters of Aubrey Beardsley*, p. 51.

¹² It is characteristic of Beardsley to refer to new work as an improvement on old. His rapid stylistic changes seem to have necessitated a belief in the continued progress and amelioration of his work.

especially as title page designs were sometimes used as advertisements, and the drawing was initially rejected.

Beardsley explains in a letter to Ross ‘I think the title page I drew for *Salomé* was after all “impossible”. You see booksellers couldn’t stick it up in their windows. I have done another with rose patterns and *Salomé* and a little grotesque Eros, to my mind a great improvement on the first.’¹³ Beardsley puts ‘impossible’ in quotation marks in order to indicate reported speech, so clearly there had been some discussion, presumably with Lane, who personally supervised the project, at this point. Either Ross had been privy to this discussion, or it had been related to him by Beardsley. ‘After all’ speaks of some degree of argument, yet Beardsley seems to have agreed pragmatically that the original design was unacceptably explicit for its function. The drawing of ‘*Salomé* and a little grotesque Eros’ was ostensibly intended as a replacement design.

Ultimately, however, a bowdlerized version of the image, for which the genitals were blanked out, was used for the title page (figure 32). One might have expected the original drawing to have been censored by scraping out or overpainting with body white and inking in, yet it survives intact. A line block must have been made from the drawing by Carl Hentschel, the block maker for *Salomé*, the changes made on a proof impression taken from this block, and then another block made from this.¹⁴

The substitute design was ultimately used as the border for a list of Beardsley’s illustrations (figure 38). It has always been assumed that this was a straightforward *volte face*, and that Beardsley’s original intention in drawing the second design was that it should simply replace the original design and become the title page itself, and that the first design should remain unpublished.

Yet, although this assumption has never been questioned, it seems strange that the obvious form of censorship for the title page drawing, and that which was ultimately carried out, was not thought of immediately. Why would Beardsley produce another drawing, as elaborate and time consuming to draw as the first, to replace one which could so readily be made acceptable to a contemporary audience? Especially since there is a pressing issue of time here, since these drawings were made towards the beginning of Beardsley’s work on the commission when there were many more to produce. Moreover, Beardsley was still struggling to keep up with the weekly deadlines of his *Morte Darthur* commission for the publisher J. M.

¹³ *The Letters of Aubrey Beardsley*, p. 52.

Dent at this time. There has to be a motive, and although there is no evidence of what happened apart from the glancing remarks made by Beardsley in his letter to Ross, my supposition is that Beardsley engineered this situation as a way of lobbying Lane to include *both* drawings, and that his intention from the outset was that the first drawing would be censored and used as the title page, and that the second drawing should be employed as a border for a list of his illustrations.

A separate border for the list of Beardsley's illustrations would probably not have been part of Lane's original plan. Although it is difficult to speculate about Lane's agenda, since the art nouveau illustrated book was in 1893 such a recent development and had such a variable form, at this point it was rare to find anything other than a simple unadorned list. Often the decorative nature of the illustrations required no list at all. The presence of a list in a book which had a single illustrator, whose illustrations would often have titles accompanying them, if they had any at all, was partly a lingering convention from book design of the 1860s and 1870s, where multiple illustrators needed to be individually identified along with the wood-engraver of each image. Such a list would be placed after the title page, and in the case of large gift books, could extend to several pages. In the new style of books of the 1890s, although in some ways the status of the illustrator was slightly raised, the concern with overall harmony and design of the book meant that the inaesthetic publication information at the front was kept to a minimum. Ricketts, in designing and illustrating Wilde's poem *The Sphinx* (1894), compressed all this information into two extremely small spaces at the top and bottom of the title page, which comprised a large illustration, and which was uniquely on the verso page. Thus the title page and the first page of the poem share an opening, making the point very clearly that the design itself takes precedence over more prosaic details such as illustration titles.

So it seems likely that Beardsley got his 'own' page by some degree of subterfuge - once the two drawings were in Lane's hands, then it was simple and obvious enough to make the suggestion that both could be included. Moreover, presumably Beardsley presented the second border design to Lane as an extra drawing into the bargain, since he had already been paid for a certain number of illustrations.

In contrast to other illustrators' insistence on the priority of overall design, having the border included as a counterpart to the title page overtly raised

¹⁴ Haldane MacFall describes this decision to preserve the original drawings intact in *Aubrey Beardsley: The Man and His Work* (London: John Lane), p. 51.

Beardsley's status as the illustrator, presenting him in the book on a nearly equal footing with Wilde. The format of the two images is identical and there is no simplification in the border design. If the title page is Wilde's property, then the border is Beardsley's, in which case his comment that the new design is 'to my mind a great improvement on the first' takes on a competitive tone. I would like to suggest that Beardsley intended all along that the title page drawing would remain just that, with slight amendments, and that the border should be used to give greater prominence to his status as illustrator.

This initial problem of the title page obscenity clearly did not sour relations between Beardsley and Lane at this point. An illustrated letter postmarked 12th September 1893 which Beardsley sent to Lane in Paris, where the latter was staying with William Rothenstein, is written in a teasing and jocular tone. The letter, which begins 'Dear and Reverend Sir', reads:

I hope that William Rothenstein has done no more than take you to the Chat Noir in the daytime and shown you the outside of the Moulin Rouge. I am going to Jimmie's on Thursday night dressed up as a tart and mean to have a regular spree. I suppose you will be back at the 'Tete de Bodley' next week looking a gay and garish Parisian.¹⁵

Stage Two: 'A veritable fronde'

However, later in September and shortly after Lane's return to England, the second phase of problems with the illustrations began. Beardsley wrote an urgent letter to Ross at this time, saying: 'Come and have lunch with me tomorrow Wednesday 1.30. Come as early as you can as I have much to say to you, and will expect of you counsel, advice and resolution.'¹⁶ The tone of this letter lacks the jocular and enthusiasm which characterises the previous letters of this period. Lane had arrived back at the Bodley Head from Paris in the middle of the month to find more of Beardsley's drawings awaiting him, and he must have been surprised and worried by their sexual and satiric content (which I will go on to discuss in detail in chapters II and III). After the equivocation over the title page and the agreement they had

¹⁵ This joke about Jimmie's does not mean that Beardsley intended to go out dressed as a woman, despite the comic drawing in the letter in which he represents himself wearing women's clothes. A tart was a slang term used for rent boys as well as for female prostitutes, so Beardsley means that he intended to dress ostentatiously. Jimmie's was an establishment notorious for its patronage by prostitutes; as Robert Machray puts it, 'Here is the chiefest temple of the demi-monde. So long as a member of the scarlet sisterhood can put in an appearance at 'Jimmy's' she fancies she is not wholly a failure!!!!' Robert Machray, *The Night Side of London* (London: John Macqueen, 1902), p. 17.

¹⁶ *The Letters of Aubrey Beardsley*, pp. 53-54.

reached, Lane must scarcely have expected the subsequent illustrations to perpetuate this problem.

Lane's response was to appeal to professional advice. Haldane MacFall relates this event:

Elkin Mathews and John Lane realised that the drawings could not appear without certain mitigations, though, as a matter of fact, there were but two particularly gross indecencies in them. Both men were anxious to achieve public recognition for Beardsley, and they knew him to be "difficult". However, Gleeson White was consulted, and he consulted me amongst others as an outside and independent opinion. Being greatly pleased by the suggestions that I made, Gleeson White put them forward, and told me they were warmly welcomed by the two troubled men who would have had to bear the brunt of the obloquy for any mistake or indiscretion.¹⁷

In a letter to King postmarked 27th September Beardsley describes the furore surrounding his illustrations: 'My drawings for *Salomé* have aroused great excitement and plenty of abuse.'¹⁸ In a letter to Rothenstein written in September Beardsley describes the reaction again and refers to the committee: 'The *Salomé* drawings have created a veritable fronde, with George Moore at the head of the frondeurs.'

It is significant that Lane was careful to show the illustrations to a scholarly and liberal audience who were not part of the close-knit coterie surrounding his own publishing firm, many of whom were members of Wilde's circle. Of the characters we know to have been involved, Gleeson White was the editor of the *Studio*, which had published Pennell's article about Beardsley in April, and who was an expert on nineteenth-century book illustration.¹⁹ Haldane MacFall was an art critic, who went on to write a regular column in *St Paul's*, a magazine which ran from early 1894 to 1900, and which commissioned a number of drawings from Beardsley in August 1893 for its first numbers. Moore was an established author, who had studied painting in Paris as a young man during the 1870s, and had imported the Realism which characterised avant-garde French literature to the Victorian novel. His first novel, *A Modern Lover* (1883), was banned by the circulating libraries in England, and this event clarified Moore's position as an outspoken critic of censorship and prudery. In 1885 he published a pamphlet entitled *Literature at Nurse, or, Circulating Morals*, a critique of the moral control

¹⁷ MacFall, p. 51.

¹⁸ *The Letters of Aubrey Beardsley*, p. 55.

exercised by these libraries. Moore's most successful novel *Esther Waters*, which deals with the difficult themes of seduction, desertion, poverty and hardship, was published shortly after this involvement with the Bodley Head, in 1894.

It is difficult to assess the real nature of the response of these men to Beardsley's *Salomé* drawings. It has always been assumed that by 'fronde' Beardsley meant a general fracas, and that he was under fire both from Lane and from Gleeson White's consultants. Certainly his description of 'abuse' fits this reading. However, there is an alternative construction. 'Fronde', a term coined in France in the mid seventeenth century, has an explicit historical meaning as a revolt against authority. The Fronde was a rebellion by the people against Cardinal Mazarin and the Court during the minority of Louis XIV, and the name came from the behaviour of the crowd, who by one of their methods of fighting gained the name 'frondeurs', or 'slingers'. The OED gives examples of 'fronde' and 'frondeur' being used in English newspapers and journals during the 1880s exclusively in the French historical sense, as referring to revolution against established authority. So Beardsley's usage of the terms might be more nuanced than has previously been supposed, and it is possible that Gleeson White's committee were fighting his corner, and not in opposition to his drawings. If George Moore was at the head of the frondeurs, was he challenging Lane's authority as publisher in support of Beardsley's drawings? Or alternatively was Beardsley casting himself in the authoritarian rôle as the artist, and suggesting that he had been the victim of an uprising?

Given his public stance on censorship issues, Moore seems at first most likely to be a supporter of Beardsley. Yet on the other hand, the ostensibly frivolous sexual and satirical elements in Beardsley's illustrations may equally well have elicited a censorious reaction from Moore, whose battle against censorship was against those who sought to suppress literary and graphic depictions of the social issues of injustice and hardship. The moral framework which was crucial to Moore is absent from Beardsley's *Salomé* illustrations.

Beardsley clearly had little respect for Moore, both before and after the event of this second crisis with his illustrations. As early as October 1891 he gives an opinion on Moore's work in a letter to King: 'I have been reading that book of G. Moore's you spoke of, *A Mere Accident*. I was not wholly pleased with the

¹⁹ He published the first scholarly work on English illustration of the 1860s a few years later: Joseph William Gleeson White, *English Illustration: The Sixties: 1855-1897* (London: Constable, 1897).

same. Realism - so-called - does not seem to flourish on British soil.'²⁰ Beardsley then made a couple of disparaging references to Moore in late November 1893. In a letter to Rothenstein written around November 20th 1893 he writes: 'I suppose you saw Max's latest caricatures. The George Moore I thought simply incomparable.'²¹ In a long letter to Ross written in late November Beardsley writes: 'Verlaine is over here, I met him at the Harland's [*sic*]. He is a dear old thing. Moore's article about him was a downright libel.'²² However, less than a week before this Beardsley had written to Rothenstein with colloquial sincerity: 'I hear the Verlaine lecture was rot.'²³ Given that the article had been written nearly four years before this, Beardsley would seem to mention it alongside an account of his own meeting with Verlaine only in order to vent his displeasure with Moore. If Moore had been supportive, it is unlikely that Beardsley would have exhibited such hostility. Another factor in favour of this interpretation is that Moore caused problems for Beardsley late in 1895 during the preparation of the prospectus for the *Savoy*, when he attempted to prevent an inappropriate sexual detail from being published.²⁴

Whichever way the fronde was fought, in the end the suggestions for censorship were very minor. No drawings were rejected at this stage, but, as MacFall records, two were subjected to small alterations. One of these was 'Enter Herodias', which featured a naked page boy (figure 2). Censorship of this figure's nudity was inconsistent, since the frontispiece drawing also depicts a male nude, yet perhaps the greater degree of realism in the depiction of his body, and his markedly effeminate appearance with a powder puff and a beauty spot, was problematic. Accordingly, Beardsley scraped out the genitalia of the page and added the fig leaf in its place, tied by its stem to a cord around the page's waist with a bow. On a proof print of the first version of the image which he presented to his friend Alfred Lambart Beardsley wrote the limerick:

Because one figure was undressed
 This little drawing was suppressed.
 It was unkind -
 But never mind
 Perhaps it all was for the best.

²⁰ *The Letters of Aubrey Beardsley*, p. 30.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 56. Beardsley saw an unpublished caricature of Moore.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 58. Verlaine lectured at Barnard's Inn, High Holborn on 21 November 1893. Moore's article was 'A Great Poet' in *The Hawk*, 25 February 1890.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

²⁴ James G. Nelson, *Publisher to the Decadents: Leonard Smithers in the Careers of Beardsley, Wilde, Dowson* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), p. 69.

The alteration to this illustration, the fig leaf covering the page's previously exposed genitals, was made on the original drawing after the first line block had been made.²⁵

The other recommendation made was that the sitting boy's pubic hair in 'The Toilette of Salomé' (figure 62) was blanked out. The iconography in the 1897 collection of Beardsley's work *A Book of Fifty Drawings* records that this version of the image was printed in two states, one with and one without pubic hair.²⁶ Lane's 1899 collection *The Early Work of Aubrey Beardsley* prints the censored version of the image.

These two recommendations for censorship are closely linked and consistent in that they both identify realistic depictions of male nudity as problematic, but allow schematic representations of the nude to go uncensored. However, unaccountably they do not address any of the obscene or facetious details which would surely have been more pressing candidates for censorship: the musician's erect penis in 'The Stomach Dance' (figure 59), for example (if this drawing had been produced at this point), or the grotesque attendant's giant phallus in 'Enter Herodias'. It is possible that these two minor alterations were thought to direct attention away from more outrageous details, to reassure readers - however disingenuously - that decency had duly been observed.

How much Lane himself was aware of the extent of the sexual and satirical elements in Beardsley's illustrations is a moot point. His reputation for lack of visual sophistication was a standing joke for Wilde, Beardsley, Max Beerbohm and Rothenstein. In a letter to Rothenstein of August 24 1893, Beerbohm describes having been given two of Beardsley's drawings by Lane: 'I am enamoured of them. So is John Lane: he said "How lucky I am to have got hold of this young Beardsley: look at the technique of his drawings! What workmanship! *He never goes over the edges!*" He never said anything of the kind...'²⁷ Beerbohm reported another anecdote about Lane in a letter to Reggie Turner postmarked September 22nd 1893:

It seems that John Lane is furious with Will Rothenstein, whose guest he has been for a few days in Paris. After conducting his publisher to the Louvre, taking him into every room and listening with great attention to his detailed opinions of all the pictures, he suddenly turned upon him with pent-

²⁵ See Brian Reade, 'Enter Herodias: Or, What Really Happened?', *Los Angeles County Museum Bulletin*, 22 (1976), 58-65 (p. 65).

²⁶ *A Book of Fifty Drawings* (London: Leonard Smithers, 1897), p. 207.

²⁷ *Max and Will: Max Beerbohm and William Rothenstein Their Friendship and Letters 1893-1945*, ed. by Mary M. Lago and Karl Beckson (London: John Murray, 1975), p. 17.

up fury and insolence and told him never to mention Art again: inasmuch as he knew nothing whatever about it and probably cared less. John Lane is extremely bitter about him now in consequence and is probably going to get someone else to design a book-plate, instead of one for which he has already paid Will Rothenstein. Isn't it rather sad?²⁸

However, this philistinism was almost certainly overstated for the sake of the joke. Lane's biographer J. Lewis May delicately equivocates when he records that 'Lane had, so to speak, to put [Beardsley's drawings] under the microscope and look at them sideways and upside down, and even so, "in his innocence" (as I have heard him put it), he overlooked a few things which he would otherwise have caused to be omitted.'²⁹ The most compelling explanation to me is that Lane was aware of what Beardsley was up to, and deliberately allowed some of the sexual elements to remain in the illustrations in the interests of sensationalism and sales. Protected by this reputation for lack of sophistication, he would perhaps have realised that he could publish the illustrations with a degree of impunity. Moreover, his organised canvassing of expert opinion would further have protected him from blame if later called to account: he had been seen to act responsibly.

Stage Three: 'A warm time of it between Lane and Oscar and Co.'

After this second crisis there is a gap in the correspondence, with no preserved letters from October at all. It is probable that Beardsley was unwell during this month, as two of the letters he wrote late in September 1893 refer to a debilitating bout of illness. His letter to King from the end of September refers to his health as 'very feeble' and his work as 'very exacting.'³⁰

Beardsley's next recorded letter is to Lane, dated 4th November 1893. It indicates a serious problem between Lane and Wilde, who up to this point had not been involved in the negotiations. Beardsley writes:

I have been considering the matter of *Salomé* and I think the only feasible plan is to let the drawings remain in your hands. I quite recognise that they are legally your property as long as you consent to make them public, and that their transference to another publisher would only lead to trouble. I hope you may settle satisfactorily with Wilde.³¹

²⁸ Max Beerbohm, *Letters to Reggie Turner* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1964), pp.69-70. Similarly, Wilde mocks Lane for his provincial Englishness in a letter in which he argues 'Nor was the manuscript of *Salomé* submitted to [the Bodley Head] beforehand: any desire on the part of Mr Lane to have the manuscript of my French play submitted to him for his approval would I fear have excited considerable amusement in myself and in others.' *The Letters of Oscar Wilde*, p. 397.

²⁹ J. Lewis May, *John Lane and the Nineties* (London: John Lane, 1936), pp. 78-79.

³⁰ *The Letters of Aubrey Beardsley*, p. 55.

³¹ *The Letters of Aubrey Beardsley*, p. 56.

I interpret this problem as relating both to problems with the translation of Wilde's French text and to the nature of the illustrations, although unfortunately there is insufficient evidence to construct a precise narrative of events.

The story of the translation is a complex one in itself. Wilde had asked Alfred Douglas to translate *Salomé* during August, and this translation contained what Wilde was to refer to in *De Profundis* as 'schoolboy faults'.³² Beardsley offered to make the translation himself, and worked on it during September, but his efforts were also rejected by Wilde.³³ Arguments about the quality of the translation went on throughout September, culminating, at least provisionally, with Douglas formally withdrawing from the arrangement at the end of the month. However, no alternative arrangements for the translation were made. Douglas's parting shot in a letter to Lane of September 30th is the remark: 'My private opinion is that unless Oscar translates it himself, he will not be satisfied.'³⁴ This was probably what happened.

As Beardsley's letter to Lane reveals, Wilde had threatened to withdraw entirely from the publishing agreement at the beginning of November. Telegrams which he sent to the London solicitor and specialist in literary matters Charles Kains-Jackson which have recently come to light show that Wilde was seeking legal advice on the matter. A telegram which he sent on November 6th reads 'Can you come and see me here tomorrow at eleven. Wish to consult you professionally on *Salomé* business' On the back of the telegram is a note saying 'Reply - that C. K.-J. will keep appointment'.³⁵ On November 10th Wilde contacted Kains-Jackson again with two telegrams and two notes, one of which names the reason for the proposed meeting as 'Lane's conduct in reference to *Salomé*'.

Unfortunately there is not enough evidence to be specific about the nature of this 'conduct'. Was Lane trying to hurry the publication process, and insisting on sending a draft of the translation with which Wilde was unhappy to the printers? Having seen Beardsley's illustrations for the first time did Wilde attempt to stop them from being published with his play? However, one way or another the

³² *The Letters of Oscar Wilde*, p. 432.

³³ Matthew Sturgis, *Aubrey Beardsley: A Biography* (London: Harper Collins, 1998), pp. 161-62.

³⁴ Quoted in Ellmann, p. 380.

³⁵ *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*, ed. by Merlin Holland and Rupert Hart-Davis (London: Fourth Estate, 2000), p. 574.

problem with the text was very swiftly solved, as it was in type at Constable's, the printing firm in Edinburgh, by November 13th.³⁶

Beardsley's November 4th letter to Lane is relevant to this narrative for two reasons. Firstly, it reveals that all the *Salomé* drawings were made and at the Bodley Head ready to be sent to the printers by early November. Secondly, it indicates that another problem with the pictures had recently arisen. This third and most serious crisis with them therefore occurred in October or November.

Beardsley wrote a long letter late in the month to Ross, who at this point was at Davos, having been obliged to leave London temporarily because of a scandal involving Douglas and a schoolboy.³⁷ The letter contains a lot of news as by this time Ross had been away from London for around 6 weeks. Beardsley writes:

I suppose you've heard all about the *Salomé* row. I can tell you I had a warm time of it between Lane and Oscar & Co. For one week the numbers of telegraph and messenger boys who came to the door was simply scandalous. I really don't quite know how matters really stand now. Anyhow Bozie's [*sic.*] name is not to turn up on the Title. The book will be out soon after Christmas. I have withdrawn three of the illustrations and supplied their places with three new ones (simply beautiful and quite irrelevant)³⁸

This evidence removes any possibility that the more usual interpretation - that problems with the illustrations were identified in a single, if protracted, incident - can be an accurate or satisfactory explanation. Beardsley asked Ross in *September* for 'counsel, advice and resolution,' and since it was not until October 15th that Ross left England for Bruges, he must have known about the second crisis in its entirety. This letter from Beardsley to Ross in late November must therefore describe a separate third crisis. Lane's use of telegraph and messenger boys to communicate with Beardsley when at this time in London there were six to eight posts per day, indicates great hurry. Although in theory it only took two hours to make a line block from a drawing, given the exigencies of Hentschel's business, it probably took longer than this in practice.³⁹ The text of *Salomé* was probably at the printers and the type being set whilst Beardsley was working on the last drawings.

³⁶ Nelson, *The Early Nineties*, p. 242. Wilde had also made many changes to the first proofs of the French text of *Salomé*. See Ellmann, p. 353.

³⁷ See Ellmann, pp. 382-383.

³⁸ *The Letters of Aubrey Beardsley*, p. 58.

³⁹ See Carl Hentschel, 'Process Engraving', *Journal of the Society of Arts*, 48 (1900), 461-74. Hentschel gives a precise time scale: 'Now-a-days half-tone blocks are wanted in two to four hours and line blocks in two hours' (p. 467).

Beardsley's letter to Ross reveals that he was in the eye of the storm, and that 'Oscar and Co.' were the agencies of this last crisis.

An unpublished letter from Douglas to Lane sheds further light on this problem. Douglas writes:

Dear Mr Lane
 Oscar asks me to write for him to ask you to bring the Aubrey Beardsley drawings round here now.
 Yours very truly
 Alfred Douglas⁴⁰

This letter is written on headed paper from the Albermarle Hotel on Piccadilly, and only dated 'Thursday'. The tone is peremptory, even by Douglas's standards, and the formula 'yours very truly' is the most dismissive form available in an ostensibly polite letter of the time.

Wilde, who had not been invited to form part of the committee convened in September formed by Gleeson White, and who had been away from London for most of this time, staying at Goring-on-Thames, perhaps heard that Beardsley's illustrations contained many sexual and satiric details from someone who had seen them, and had realised that he had to see them before they were sent to the printers, which was imminent. Moreover, according to an acquaintance of Wilde's, he 'abhorred [George Moore] with some contempt', and apparently made no secret of it, which would no doubt have exacerbated his sense of outrage at Lane's behaviour.⁴¹ During the short time he had the drawings, Wilde took them to show Ricketts, who recorded Wilde's opinion:

It was Beardsley's entire disregard for Flaubert's spirit of remoteness, ritual and romance which made Wilde detest his illustrations to *Salomé*. He would say "My Herod is like the Herod of Gustave Moreau - wrapped in his jewels and sorrows. My Salomé is a mystic, the sister of Salammbô, a Saint Thérèse who worships the moon; dear Aubrey's designs are like the naughty scribbles a precocious schoolboy makes on the margins of his copybooks."⁴²

Perhaps Wilde did initially refuse to have his text published alongside the drawings when he first saw them. Was the result of his negotiation with Kains-Jackson the information that he could not legally withdraw from his contract? And did Ricketts

⁴⁰ Transcribed from the letter, which is in the collection of the William Andrews Clark Memorial Library in Los Angeles.

⁴¹ Vincent O'Sullivan, *Aspects of Wilde* (London: Constable, 1936), p. 21.

⁴² Charles Ricketts, *Oscar Wilde: Recollections* (London: Nonesuch, 1932), pp. 51-52.

persuade Wilde that the iconography of many of Beardsley's 'naughty scribbles' was not accessible to a wide audience, and so not likely to damage Wilde's reputation? Wilde certainly insisted at this stage on exercising a degree of control over Beardsley's drawings, although he must have realised that thorough censorship of all satirical and sexual details was impossible. In the event, the 'warm time of it' which Beardsley had between 'Lane and Oscar & Co.' resulted in the withdrawal of three illustrations.

Of the three to be withdrawn, one was the 'Toilette of Salomé', which had previously been recommended for alteration by Gleeson White's committee. Beardsley replaced it with another image of the same name (figure 67). Another was 'John and Salomé' (figure 77), which, as Aymer Vallance records in his 1897 iconography, was replaced by 'The Black Cape' (figure 42).⁴³ The decision to censor 'John and Salomé' seems arbitrary, and hard to understand in the face of the problems with obscenity in other illustrations; I am unable to provide an explanation.

I believe that the third drawing to be replaced was not, as is generally supposed, 'Salomé on Settle' (figure 78) but the cover design. (I will go on to discuss the interesting case of 'Salomé on Settle' at the end of chapter III.) The original cover design shows large peacock feathers which fill the entire space of the drawing surface in a roughly symmetrical pattern (figure 3).⁴⁴ This replacement of the cover was not because of indecent content but probably because it was felt that it would not have reproduced well on the kind of cloth Lane intended to use for the cover. Wilde writes to Lane in order to complain about this cloth in a letter which the editor Rupert Hart-Davis dates as circa December 1893, but which I think was probably written in November:

The cover of *Salomé* is quite dreadful. Don't spoil a lovely book. Have simply a folded vellum wrapper with the design in scarlet - much cheaper, and much better. The texture of the present cover is coarse and common: it is quite impossible and spoils the real beauty of the interior. Use up this horrid Irish stuff for stories, etc: don't inflict it on a work of art like

⁴³ *A Book of Fifty Drawings*, p. 207.

⁴⁴ This design was published a number of times and overtook the finished cover design in popularity for later editions of *Salomé*. It was published for the first time in 1899 as plate 41 in Lane's *Early Work of Aubrey Beardsley*. It was also reproduced in Smithers's 1904 pirated edition of *Salomé*. Smithers had the illustrations reproduced from the line blocks in the first edition, and - for the previously suppressed images - from *The Early Work*. He also reproduced this version of the cover design as the first illustration in the book. This was first used as a cover design, printed in gold on green linen boards, for Lane's 1906 edition. Lane also published this design in 1907 as plate III in the *Portfolio*. As late as 1930 it was blocked blind onto scarlet linen for a large paper edition of *Salomé* published by the Bodley Head.

Salomé. It really will do you a great deal of harm. Everyone will say that it is coarse and inappropriate. I loathe it. So does Beardsley.⁴⁵

It must have been Lane's insistence on using the 'horrid Irish stuff', despite Wilde's suggestion that it was not too late to change this decision, which had implications for the cover design. As it was, Beardsley's replacement design itself (figure 4) was subject to alteration. The spine was relettered in order to fit a narrower space, and the cover lettering was omitted. The fine sharp lines of the lettering, in particular the long extension to the R of OSCAR, would presumably have been distorted and obscured by the coarsely woven blue cloth; as it is, the fine lettering which appears on the spine of the published book is difficult to read. Rather than change his decision about the cloth, Lane seems to have decided to alter the cover design, using only the decorative cartouche and not the lettering. To this end, a line block seems to have been made only from the cartouche, omitting Beardsley's lettering, and this motif was placed in the centre of the cover, and not, as originally intended, in the top corner (figure 5).

After this long series of delays *Salomé* was finally published on February 9th 1894, when the intended publication date at the point at which the contract was signed would have been around November 1893.

The long and complex publication history shows how the drawings were affected by censorship at each of the three stages. I would also like to suggest that, paradoxically, if they had not been through this process their content would have been less satirical, and that censorship exacerbated rather than allayed the problem. 'The Climax', one of the first drawings to be produced, is not satirical, nor does it contain sexual elements, whilst 'The Black Cape', one of the last, is entirely motivated by a satirical and sexual agenda. Similarly, the border design contains a subtle satirical commentary on the censorship of the title page, and the second version of the toilette scene refines and hones the satirical jokes made by the first. I will go on to discuss these issues in detail in chapter III.

⁴⁵ *The Letters of Oscar Wilde*, p. 348.

Chapter II

‘The head of Oscar the Poëtast on a charger’: Beardsley’s Satirical Context

It is our conviction that there never was a single strictly straightforward genre, no single type of direct discourse - artistic, rhetorical, philosophical, religious, ordinary everyday - that did not have its own parodying and travesty double, its own comic-ironic *contre-partie*.¹

Whilst it has always been acknowledged that Beardsley’s illustrations to *Salomé* have some satirical elements - noting the caricature heads, one of the very earliest commentators remarks ‘Mr. Beardsley laughs at Mr. Wilde’² - the deep conviction that illustration could never have the kind of predatory shadow described by Mikhail Bakhtin has shaped thought on the subject. The disruptive elements in the *Salomé* illustrations have never been explored as anything other than disrespectful arabesques and gestures of youthful exuberance contained within - and subsumed by - an illustrative scheme. Even on the occasions when it has been doubted that the images fulfil any sort of illustrative function at all, no other genre has ever been proposed as a shaping form, and the satiric elements have in these cases either been ignored or accepted as isolated phenomena.

This thread of scepticism can be traced through the critical writing on Beardsley. The most influential of commentators, Brian Reade, plays the caricature elements down: ‘That Wilde was caricatured mildly in the frontispiece, in ‘A Platonic Lament’, in ‘Enter Herodias’ and in ‘The Eyes of Herod’ [figures 26, 44, 45 and 58], doubtless annoyed him, but Beardsley had a habit of caricaturing his friends and acquaintances without real malice. And the notion that he satirized the play and despised Wilde at the date of these drawings cannot be confirmed...’³ Kenneth Clark doubts that one of the caricatures exists at all: ‘The showman on the right [of “Enter Herodias”] is usually said to represent Oscar Wilde, but I have never seen any evidence that this was Beardsley’s intention, or that Wilde recognized the resemblance.’⁴ Lorraine Janzen Kooistra suggests that there are no caricatures, only portraits: ‘Beardsley’s caricatures of Wilde, which appear

¹ Mikhail Bakhtin, ‘From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse’ in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. by Michael Holquist, trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 53.

² Anon., *Saturday Review*, 24 March 1894, p. 317.

³ Brian Reade, *Beardsley* (London: Studio Vista, 1967), p. 336, n. 283.

⁴ Clark, *The Best of Aubrey Beardsley*, p. 90.

throughout the series of plates, are not schoolboy lampoons or insolent sneers at the author as so many critics have suggested. Rather, the repetition of Wilde's features - in 'The Woman in the Moon', 'A Platonic Lament', 'Enter Herodias', and 'The Eyes of Herod' - represent the artist's critical recognition that the author inscribes his personality throughout the play. Beardsley's caricatures show his insight that Wilde, as he wrote later in *De Profundis*, "took the drama, the most objective form known to art, and made it as personal a mode of expression as the lyric or the sonnet..."⁵ Zatlin has recently advanced Kooistra's argument further by suggesting that Beardsley's depictions of Wilde are not neutral but are in fact intended as praise:

The drawings for the play, moreover, can be read as complimenting or even flattering Wilde. In 1906 Robert Ross told John Lane that 'the two [drawings] in which Oscar appears [are] "The Face in the Moon" [sometimes called "The Woman in the Moon"] and "Enter Herodias".' Wilde's face may also appear in 'The Eyes of Herod' and 'The Platonic Lament' [*sic.*]. An examination of the details, however, reveals that these are not caricatures of Wilde. They have none of the cruelty all too evident in Beerbohm and Toulouse-Lautrec's caricatures of him; as a matter of fact, the moon's eyes in these drawings evince pain.⁶

The momentum of scepticism apparent here seems to me to have more to do with expectations of the illustrative form than with what is actually present. Even with this unpredictable and maverick illustrator at the helm, the genre of illustration would be expected chastely to repel rather than undiscerningly to accommodate satire as a constituent element. After all, satire is the most disrespectful and demotic of genres, its principal intention being to mock the Establishment, whether this authority be military, royal, intellectual, literary, artistic, political or social. Its weapons are parody, sarcasm, irony and ridicule, its aims to expose and deride what its practitioners believe to be vice, pretentiousness and foolishness.

Illustration was subject to well-documented rules at the time that Beardsley was working on *Salomé*. The renaissance in book design of the late 1880s and early 1890s⁷ was accompanied by many histories and manuals which set out to theorize

⁵ Lorraine Janzen Kooistra, *The Artist as Critic: Bitextuality in Fin-de-Siècle Illustrated Books* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1995), p. 138. Kooistra is wrong in stating that recognition of satirical elements was widespread.

⁶ Zatlin, 'Wilde Beardsley and the Making of *Salomé*', p. 353. I would argue that Ross played down these elements in his correspondence with Lane before his publication of a new edition of the illustrated *Salomé* for reasons of propriety.

⁷ See John Russell Taylor, *The Art Nouveau Book in Britain* (London: Methuen, 1966); Nelson, *The Early Nineties*; Simon Houfe, *Fin de Siècle: the Illustrators of the 'Nineties* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1992).

illustration. All of these stress how vitally important it was that illustrations should provide a supportive set of images for a text, to reveal in a faithful way what the literary narrative evoked, and only to operate within parameters pre-established by the authoritative text. The illustrator, according to one writer, was ‘not at liberty to paint or draw his own unaided imaginings; he is merely interpreting another’s words into a graphic representation.’⁸ Above all, ‘harmony between text and illustration’ was repeatedly emphasized.⁹

This requirement of illustration to be subservient to the text was deeply felt. Prompted by the inclusion of frontispiece illustrations by the photographer Alvin Langdon Coburn in the revised New York editions of his novels, published in the 1900s, Henry James tackled the issue of book illustration in his preface to *The Golden Bowl*:

I should in fact be tempted here, but for lack of space, by the very question itself at large - that question of the general acceptability of illustration coming up sooner or later, in these days, for the author of any text putting forward illustrative claims (that is producing an effect of illustration) by its own intrinsic virtue and so finding itself elbowed, on that ground, by another and a competitive process. The essence of any representational work is of course to bristle with immediate images; and I, for one, should have looked much askance at the proposal, on the part of my associates in the whole business, to graft or “grow”, at whatever point, a picture by another hand on my own picture - this being always, to my sense, a lawless incident.¹⁰

James’s terminology reveals that he approached the issue as a territorial matter; illustration, insisted upon by publishers for whom it would make a book more saleable, was prone to trespass damagingly upon the author’s turf. His word ‘lawless’ implies an uncontrolled, unpredictable and potentially damaging form of behaviour, and betrays real anxiety about the power of illustrations to distort a reader’s experience of a text, even when the illustrations are ostensibly supportive.

So the function of illustration during this period was either to provide visual evidence of the things described by the text, or to provide a harmonious decorative backdrop, to be what James terms ‘mere optical symbols or echoes, expressions of no particular thing in the text, but only of the type or idea of this or that thing.’¹¹

⁸ Horsley Hinton, p. 22. See also Blackburn; Crane; Joseph Pennell, *Pen Drawing and Pen Draughtsmen: Their Work and Methods* (London: Macmillan, 1889); Joseph Pennell, *Modern Illustration* (London: George Bell, 1898); Charles Ricketts, *A Defence of the Revival of Printing* (London: Ballantyne, 1899).

⁹ See particularly Crane, p. 139.

¹⁰ Henry James, *The Golden Bowl* (New York: Scribner’s, 1909), p. ix.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. xi.

These two activities are both deeply antipathetic to satire, which is not only always against the grain, contrary and perpetually in opposition, but is also perhaps the most subject-led of all graphic forms.

The purpose of this chapter is to challenge the idea that the *Salomé* illustrations are not primarily satirical, paradoxical as this may seem given the polarity of illustration and satire, and to suggest that they exemplify the travestying double of illustration, its 'comic-ironic *contre-partie*'. I will establish the general and particular historical contexts of satire which I believe to have informed Beardsley's iconography and then go on to identify the conventional procedures followed by satire. This groundwork precedes the detailed examination of each illustration which is presented in the next chapter.

Nineteenth-Century Satire

In making illustration host to satiric elements Beardsley was forging a contradictory, compound genre for which there was virtually no precedent.¹² Yet despite the subversion inherent in their setting and the difficulties this has created for interpretation, these elements correspond to established satirical conventions and relate to well documented historical contexts.

From the beginning of Queen Victoria's reign attitudes towards caricature changed to the extent that scurrility, lewdness and savage visual abuse - those qualities which had characterised late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century caricature - became totally unacceptable. The foundation of *Punch*, the most influential comic newspaper of the mid and late nineteenth century, in 1841, four years after Queen Victoria's accession, was a landmark in this shift. Satire was appropriated by the very establishment it had so ruthlessly attacked, stripped of its weapons and made authority's mouthpiece. One of the foremost Regency caricaturists, George Cruikshank, who in 1820 had been bribed with £100 'in consideration of a pledge not to caricature His Majesty in any immoral situation', became one of the greatest moralists, producing many cartoons warning of the dangers of drink, most famously his designs for *The Bottle* of 1847.¹³ Even the caricatural style of earlier drawings was well-nigh ironed out for the popular *portrait chargé*; the vigorous lines and distorted, bestial faces drawn by James Gillray and

¹² The only other example of an illustrated book in which the images are subversively satirical in relation to a serious text is *Designs by Mr. R. Bentley, for Six Poems by Mr. T. Gray*, published by Robert Dodsley in 1753. See Loftus Jestin, *The Answer to the Lyre: Richard Bentley's Illustrations for Thomas Gray's Poems* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990).

¹³ Richard Godfrey, *Printmaking in Britain* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1978), p. 78.

Thomas Rowlandson gave way to what was tantamount to portraiture and closer to the idiom of conventional painting.¹⁴

The most influential practitioners of this new school were John Doyle, whose work ‘epitomised the transition to Victorian propriety’, and John Leech.¹⁵ Their work paved the way for a more genteel kind of caricature. Comic images became the preserve of magazines and newspapers, whereas in the past they had usually been published as single sheet prints, and therefore they were subject to strict editorial control by a governing body cautious both of libel and of offending their conservative readership.

In *Punch* satiric comment was provided by ‘socials’, images illustrating some joke about different aspects of the social scene or fashionable foibles. *Punch* began to use the term ‘cartoon’, thereby ushering in a new kind of graphic commentary, the aim of which was to mock gently rather than, like satire, to attack.¹⁶ John Leech, and his successors Charles Keene, George Du Maurier and Phil May were the main proponents of this genre.

Political commentary in *Punch* was supplied by John Tenniel’s weekly allegories, which became a staple of Victorian journalistic life, as after succeeding Leech as the main political cartoonist in 1864 he did the job until his retirement in 1901. Not only were these cartoons decided upon and ratified by the editorial table at *Punch*, they also served as handmaidens of the establishment. Beerbohm recalled the nature of these cartoons, and how Tenniel’s representations of statesmen had affected his imagination as a child:

I had already, for some years, been aware of them. I had seen them, two-dimensionally and on a small scale, every Wednesday, in the pages of *Punch*, and had in a remote and tepid way revered them. I had not thought of them as actual, live men. Rather, they were, as portrayed in the cartoons of the great John Tenniel, nobly mythical to me. Sometimes they wore togas; but more often they wore chitons and breast-plates, and were wielding or brandishing swords. Their shins were protected by greaves, and their calves were immensely muscular; and in the matter of biceps they were unsurpassable. They were Ajaxes and Hector and Achilleses. Now and

¹⁴ For a characterisation of this shift, see Richard Pound, ‘“Catching Follies as they Fly”: C. J. Grant and the Market for English Political Caricature in the 1830s’, in *C. J. Grant’s Political Drama: A Radical Satirist Rediscovered*, ed. by Richard Pound (London: College Art Collections, University College London, 1998), pp. 3-5.

¹⁵ Victoria and Albert Museum [Lionel Lambourne], *English Caricature: 1620 to the Present: Caricaturists and Satirists, their Art, Their Purpose and Influence* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1984), p. 109.

¹⁶ The usage of the term ‘cartoon’ arose when a competition was launched to find artists to produce historical frescoes in the new Houses of Parliament in 1843. Leech satirized the ‘cartoons’, the large designs submitted for consideration, and the term was from that point inseparable from a comedic graphic image. *Ibid.*, p. 109.

then they rose to greater heights, becoming Herculesees, Vulcans, Marses and the like. *Punch* was firmly Gladstonian in its politics; and therefore the Prime Minister was always more muscular than any of his enemies, redoubtable though they too were; and the attitudes that he struck were more striking than theirs.¹⁷

Classical allegory became the principal tool of political commentary. It facilitated the necessity of a cartoon to exaggerate certain qualities, in the same way as caricature or coarser visual satire would exaggerate features. A politician's status or actions could be represented by dress and props, in the same way that both classical figures and saints are always known by their attributes: Neptune holds a trident, St Jerome is accompanied by a lion. In a complete inversion to previous forms of caricature, this form actively flattered its subjects rather than scourged them, and used the noblest possible body of knowledge - the classical - for its frame of reference.

Related to this use of emblems was anthropomorphic humour. Informed by works such as Grandville's *La Vie Privée et Publique des Animaux* (Paris, 1842) and Gustave Doré's *Fables de La Fontaine* (Paris, 1867) as well as by Regency satirists such as Isaac Cruikshank and Gillray, satirists such as John Doyle, Ernest Griset, a staff cartoonist for *Punch* between 1867 and 1869 and later for an imitator *Fun*, and Edward Linley Sambourne, who was on the editorial board of *Punch* from 1871, frequently used zoological frames of reference for their cartoons. Usually in these instances the head of the subject was superimposed onto the body of an animal, and through the implied characteristics and behaviour of the chosen animal the caricaturist was able to provide a more barbed commentary than was available through classical allegory (figure 6).

Another kind of caricature image was to be found in *Vanity Fair*, a society magazine founded in 1868, which published a weekly caricature of a celebrity. Leslie Ward, or 'Spy', began working for the magazine in 1873, and established the house style. Alfred Brice, or 'Grip' and Carlo Pellegrini, or 'Ape', worked within a similar sphere. These caricaturists were to be hugely influential in the depiction of figure cartoons for the remainder of the century. Their work was even more polite and refined than the kind of caricature published in *Punch*, approximating more to a mannered portrait, and this style quickly became canonical.

This increasingly respectful style of caricature was only to be challenged in the 1890s by Beerbohm, who reintroduced mannerisms of physiognomic distortion to the genre. For Beardsley, then, there was little contemporary manifestation of coarse or vitriolic graphic satire, and as I will go on to argue he used the structural

¹⁷ David Cecil, *Max: A Biography* (London: Constable, 1964), p. 16.

vocabulary of mid to late nineteenth-century cartoons - the mannered portrait, classical props and anthropomorphism - in the *Salomé* illustrations.

Caricatures of Wilde

Wilde had always been a fertile subject for cartoonists, and in caricaturing him Beardsley was following a well-trodden path. As Beerbohm points out in his review of Robert Hichens's 1894 novelistic satire upon Wilde *The Green Carnation*, caricaturing him was something of a national institution:

Whatever ridicule may do, it certainly does not kill. Else, had the loving hands of disciples long since laid Mr. Oscar Wilde in his sepulchre. [...] It is how many years since *Patience* was produced? Yet our Aristophanuncles are still pegging away at him.¹⁸

Beerbohm goes on to suggest that Wilde's caricaturists responded to his shifting public personæ - 'he is as game as Proteus' - and characterises three distinct modes:

Du Maurier saw only a languid poet with an unwholesome contempt for everything but blue china; Gilbert saw a poser in knee-breeches; Brookfield a fat man with a taste for dyed flowers and epigramme.¹⁹

Yet Beerbohm overstates the separateness of these modes, certainly the first two, for the sake of his argument, which is that in Hichens's satire 'something more than the surface of [Wilde] is impinged, and we are shown a little of his soul'.²⁰ Du Maurier and W. S. Gilbert, like countless derivative cartoonists, both caricatured Wilde during the 1880s as the centre and symbol of the fashionable aesthetic movement, for which blue and white china and knee-breeches were equally essential components, operating as a sort of visual shorthand.

From early 1880, only shortly after Wilde had come down from Oxford, *Punch* regularly caricatured him in its columns as Jellaby Postlethwaite, a poetic representative of the aesthetic movement. In 1881, when he was only 25, Wilde was caricatured by W. S. Gilbert in the comic opera *Patience* as the 'ultra-poetical, super-æsthetical, out-of-the-way young man', Bunthorne.²¹

¹⁸ Max Beerbohm, 'The Green Carnation', *Illustrated London News*, 29 September 1894, p. 406.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ W. S. Gilbert, *The Savoy Operas: Being the Complete Text of the Gilbert and Sullivan Operas as Originally Produced in the Years 1875-1896* (London: MacMillan, 1927), p. 196. In 1882 Walter Hamilton, in *The Aesthetic Movement in England*, the first book devoted to the movement, reserved an entire chapter for Wilde.

The publicity photographs of Wilde, taken during his American tour by Napoleon Sarony in New York in 1882, established the aesthetic mould, and gave every caricaturist his or her basic vocabulary: long hair, a velvet coat, knee breeches, languid poses and a soulful expression. To these all that needed to be added was a sunflower, a lily or a blue and white vase and the recipe was complete. Given the uniformity of the caricatures, it seems likely that most caricaturists were often working directly from these photographs (figure 7).

The method of depiction shared by almost all of Wilde's caricaturists of the 1880s, and which was a convention of this period, was to enlarge the head in relation to the body. The features, already greatly enlarged, are then subtly exaggerated into some expression - which in this case was inevitably one of soulful ecstasy. The body, almost always clad in knee breeches and velvet coat, was then effectually arranged, the pose often, following the photographs, showing one leg slightly bent and in front of the other. Alfred Thompson, J.B.B. Nichols, Linley Sambourne and Arthur Bryan all caricature Wilde in this way, and with a lily or a sunflower, emblematic of aestheticism, as a prop (figure 8). Like Tenniel's statesmen, Wilde as flamboyant spokesman for the aesthetic movement is signified by these attributes. The complexity and savagery of late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century graphic satire is a far cry from these representations.

An anthropomorphic mode of caricature was sometimes adapted in these caricatures of followers of the aesthetic movement, and aesthetic emblems merged with human figures. A 'Fancy Portrait' published in *Punch* superimposes Wilde's face onto a sunflower (figure 9), and the Royal Worcester Porcelain Co.'s famous double-sided teapot makes this anthropomorphism part of a Darwinian joke. The base is incised 'Fearful consequences through the laws of Natural Selection and Evolution of living up to one's teapot', and on each side of the teapot is a human figure dressed in 'aesthetic' costume, one arm limply extended to form the spout, the other placed on the hip to form the handle.

Yet despite the absence of vitriol in these caricatures, these aesthetic props did signify undesirable characteristics as well as laughable affectation. A central characteristic of the aesthetic movement, as noted by its detractors, was fraudulence. It was often observed that it was merely organised affectation, devised by the meretricious and followed by the vapid. In *Patience*, the opening lines of Bunthorne's first song run:

Am I alone,
And unobserved? I am!

Then let me own
 I'm an æsthetic sham!
 This air severe
 Is but a mere
 Veneer!
 This cynic smile
 Is but a wile
 Of guile!
 This costume chaste
 Is but good taste
 Misplaced!
 Let me confess!
 A languid love for lilies does *not* blight me!
 Lank limbs and haggard cheeks do *not* delight me!
 I do *not* care for dirty greens
 By any means.
 I do not long for all one sees
 That's Japanese.
 I am not fond of uttering platitudes
 In stained-glass attitudes.
 In short, my mediævalism's affectation,
 Born of a morbid love of admiration!²²

Wilde-as-Bunthorne is cast here as an artistic racketeer, peddling aesthetic poses in the interest of self-advertisement.

However, by the late 1880s aestheticism had become unfashionable, and an increasing concern with conventional mores began to be apparent in Wilde's appearance, as he sought to reinvent himself as a smart playwright. Photographs and portraits reveal the change, as the attention-seeking flamboyancy of his appearance in the 1880s gave way in the early 1890s to short hair and conventional suits. His dandiacal sensibility was limited and refined to small touches of extravagance in the expensive cloth and up-to-the-minute modernity of the cut of these suits, jeweled tie-pins and button-holes.²³ Wilde's aesthetic pose was superseded by conventional smartness at the precise moment he sought popular success as a playwright. Given that the profile of the playwright was higher than that of the novelist or story writer, with characteristic astuteness Wilde sought to give a public performance as a worldly and polished professional. This involved a transformation of his public image away from his erstwhile hieratic pose to one which was more likely to attract a wider audience.

This change from soulful aesthete to literary lion 'with a taste for dyed flowers and epigramme' is mirrored in caricatures of the early 1890s, Beerbohm's

²² Quoted here from Gilbert, pp. 163-4.

most prominent amongst them; his attribution of this approach to Brookfield is disingenuous. Beerbohm's caricatures emphasise Wilde's overblown dandyism with representations of his long waving hair, buttonhole carnation and large rings, and almost always depict him in oratorical mode, confidently smiling as he holds forth (figure 10). Harry Furniss and Bernard Partridge both portray smart insouciance, and a caricature by Pellegrini shows him dressed fashionably, standing with hands placed authoritatively on hips and legs firmly planted apart in a gesture of masculine assurance (figure 11). Yet Wilde was never completely to shake off the traces of his aesthetic history, even though this persona was itself largely the construction of cartoonists.

Wilde's leading part in the aesthetic movement was regarded with wry humour in the early 1890s by Beardsley and Beerbohm. Beerbohm's essay '1880' is an elaborate joke which treats the movement as an era from ancient history, a subject to interest the curious archaeologist. He writes:

It would appear that it was to [Wilde] that Art owed the great social vogue she enjoyed at this time. Peacock feathers and sunflowers glittered in every room, the curio shops were ransacked for the furniture of Annish days, men and women, fired by the fervid words of the young Oscar, threw their mahogany into the streets.²⁴

Wilde is mocked for his apostolic status with regard to what Beerbohm presents as a movement founded upon an evangelical approach to decoration and, from his wrong-end-of-the-telescope perspective, upon baffling affectation. As I will go on to argue in the following chapter, Beardsley also makes a number of visual jokes in the *Salomé* illustrations relating to the aesthetic movement. In line with all the other caricatures, cartoons and literary lampoons about Wilde's position apropos the movement, these jokes signify fraudulence and affectation. Given that aestheticism was outmoded by the early 1890s, then with these jokes Beardsley, like Beerbohm, also teases Wilde about his aesthetic past, at the point at which he had reinvented himself as a smart playwright, and when aestheticism had become old hat and *déclassé*. The aesthetic prophet may have taken to wearing smart suits rather than velvet knee breeches, and he may be more likely to walk down Piccadilly - or at least to appear on stage - with a cigarette, rather than a poppy or a lily, in his

²³ For a discussion of Wilde's public personæ and his æsthetic sources, see Stephen Calloway, 'Wilde and the Dandyism of the Senses', in *The Cambridge Companion to Oscar Wilde*, ed. by Peter Raby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 34-54 (pp.48-49).

²⁴ Max Beerbohm, '1880', *The Yellow Book: an Illustrated Quarterly*, IV (1895), 278.

‘mediæval hand’,²⁵ but *Salomé*, which seems to belong to an earlier moment in his literary production, and which sits uneasily beside his society comedies of the early 1890s, was a reminder that Wilde’s aesthetic doctrines had not changed.

The vast number of caricatures made of Wilde established for Beardsley a very strong context of representational modes. As I will go on to discuss in the following chapter, Beardsley used this established caricatural lexicon himself in order to express a far more trenchant commentary of Wilde than that expressed by other caricaturists, one gleaned from personal acquaintance with him.

Max Beerbohm

Beerbohm was arguably the single most important influence on Beardsley’s satirical work. The two probably met sometime in the Spring or early Summer of 1893, just before Beardsley began to work on the *Salomé* commission and when Beerbohm was an undergraduate at Merton College, Oxford, and they quickly became friends.²⁶ There is no evidence of exactly how they met, yet Wilde was probably their principal point of contact. Wilde got to know Beerbohm in the early Spring of 1893 (although they had in fact met once before at a supper party in 1889), when Beerbohm’s half-brother, the actor-manager Herbert Beerbohm Tree, was producing Wilde’s play *A Woman of No Importance*, and Beerbohm attended rehearsals.²⁷ As I have said, Beardsley became a member of Wilde’s coterie at much the same moment. We can assume, then, that from around April 1893 onwards Beardsley and Beerbohm both found themselves guests at Wilde’s frequent suppers and luncheon parties. Beerbohm was in London for most of the long vacation of 1893, and, as in those days Oxford permitted fourth year undergraduates to spend one term away from the university, he elected to spend Michaelmas Term of the same year in London, precisely the period during which Beardsley was working on the *Salomé* commission.²⁸

As no letters or telegrams between the two survive it is impossible to chart the trajectory of their friendship or to make an unassailable case for their intimacy. However, I believe that the similarities in their satirical treatment of Wilde at the same moment, their shared targets - and their very decision to lampoon him - demonstrate an extraordinary degree of collaboration and, given the sometimes libelous qualities of their work, a degree of mutual encouragement and daring. I will

²⁵ Gilbert, p. 165.

²⁶ Sturgis, *Aubrey Beardsley*, p. 148.

²⁷ Cecil, p. 68.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

outline Beerbohm's literary satires and remarks about Wilde in the period 1892-1893 here, and in the next chapter I will refer back to this material whenever a strong similarity in approach and target occurs.

It was as early as 1892, when Wilde's dramatic production of *Salomé* was banned in late June that year, that Beerbohm's first satirical comment on Wilde was recorded, in a letter to his friend Reggie Turner, also dating from late June:

Isn't it killing about Oscar's *Salomé* being interdicted by the Lord Chamberlain. I have designed a great picture in which King Bull makes a great feast and when they have feasted the daughter of Mrs Grundy dances before them and pleases the King - insomuch that he promises her whatsoever she shall desire. After consultation with her mother she demands that "they bring unto her by and by the head of Oscar the Poëstast on a charger."²⁹

Two main points arise here, firstly that Beerbohm is amused rather than sympathetic about Wilde's lost battle against prudish English censorship; the news which had reached Beerbohm at the most a day or two before this letter is immediately converted into a joke. Beerbohm's admiration for Wilde, which was especially strong during this early period before he knew Wilde personally, was always tempered by wry cynicism and a fastidiously maintained personal distance.³⁰ Secondly, the phrase 'Oscar the Poëstast' reveals Beerbohm's scepticism about Wilde's literary status. Mrs Grundy's only concern was impropriety, so 'Poëstast', or properly 'poetaster', a 'paltry or inferior poet' (*COD*), seems to be Beerbohm's own opinion.

In March 1893 Beerbohm, writing as 'an American', published his first article on Wilde. 'Oscar Wilde' purports to be written by a contemporary of Wilde's who had first met him as a student in an undergraduate's rooms in Oxford, and who now encounters him in the present in a Parisian restaurant. The piece, published in *Anglo-American Times* (a newspaper characterised by Beerbohm as 'a very good paper of recent birth'³¹), is a genuine character profile and generally admiring in tone; for example Wilde is called 'as charming a listener as he is a talker' and 'a perfect type and a personality without flaw'.³² However, a few critical comments are expressed. In describing his appearance Beerbohm likens Wilde's figure to that

²⁹ *Letters to Reggie Turner*, p. 22.

³⁰ For a discussion of Beerbohm's attitude towards Wilde, see John Felstiner, *The Lies of Art: Max Beerbohm's Parody and Caricature* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1973), pp. 42-54.

³¹ *Letters to Reggie Turner*, 33.

³² [Max Beerbohm posing as] An American, 'Oscar Wilde', *Anglo-American Times*, March 25 1893. Here quoted from *Letters to Reggie Turner*, pp. 285-292 (p. 287, p. 292).

of ‘some huge overgrown schoolboy’, and goes on to cast a shade of aspersion upon Wilde’s manliness: ‘his hair, comparatively short, was brought in smooth curves over his temples, giving a slightly effeminate appearance to the huge oval of his face’.³³ The issue of plagiarism, of which Wilde was frequently accused, is also addressed. Rather than dismissed, as a reader might expect in so generally respectful an essay, the truth of the aspersion is accepted with ostensibly tolerant good grace and with an implication that the writer is willing indulgently to lower his own standards in this instance: ‘we must not at the end of this century be over-particular. That which is good in literature let us accept “with no questions asked.”’

Beerbohm’s next piece was published during Trinity Term of 1893 in the undergraduate journal *The Spirit Lamp*. ‘The Incomparable Beauty of Modern Dress’, an essay in imitation of Wilde, parodies Wilde’s views on dress reform.³⁴ Beerbohm’s essay discusses the inadequacy of classical dress: ‘in the thick folds of a toga, the figure of Hyperion is hardly fairer than that of a Satyr; Punchinello, thus clad, might pass for Adonis’,³⁵ and praises the understated beauty of contemporary male costume: ‘There is something wonderful in the sombre delicacy of modern dress, in its congruity of black and of white and of grey.’³⁶ In both cases Beerbohm directly opposes Wilde, whose opinion it was that modern dress travestied the human form and that classical costume revealed it to advantage.

Remarks in a letter of September 1893 to his friend Rothenstein clarify Beerbohm’s private opinion of Wilde. Relating the events of a recent evening, he records that Emile Zola, who was visiting London at the time, had been to the Alhambra Theatre, and that ‘Oscar was also at the Alhambra, dancing attendance upon Zola’s attendants’.³⁷ This conveys a doubtful attitude towards Wilde’s literary and social status. He goes on to write: ‘Àpropos of him, did I tell you that I saw a good deal of his brother Willie at Broadstairs? Quel monstre! Dark, oily, suspecte yet awfully like Oscar: he has Oscar’s coy, carnal smile & fatuous giggle & not a little of Oscar’s esprit.’³⁸

The most significant essay written by Beerbohm at this moment, and by far the most biting satirical piece he was ever to write on Wilde, was the next, ‘A Peep into the Past’, written in late 1893 or early 1894, in the period between

³³ This ‘effeminate’ did not directly imply homosexuality. This word had been used occasionally to describe Wilde’s shaven face in newspaper reviews of his lectures since the early 1880s.

³⁴ I will discuss these views in my discussion of ‘The Black Cape’, chapter III, section v.

³⁵ Max Beerbohm, ‘The Incomparable Beauty of Modern Dress’, *Spirit Lamp*, 4 (1893), 90-98 (p. 94). The editor of this journal was Lord Alfred Douglas.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Max and Will*, p. 21.

Beardsley's production of the *Salomé* illustrations and their publication. The central conceit of this essay is that Beerbohm is interviewing Wilde, once a well known writer (although, as the essay hints, never a very good one), but now an old man, forgotten by society. Beerbohm's tone is profoundly disingenuous. In treating Wilde as an elderly man he is able to describe his work, public persona and 'reminiscences' with patronising indulgence, implying that he is amazed and impressed that one of such advanced age is still able to function, and that his continuing dedication to his work, although it is dated, and ignored by the literary world, expresses admirable perseverance. The essay begins:

Oscar Wilde! I wonder to how many of my readers the jingle of this name suggests anything at all? Yet, at one time, it was familiar to many and if we search back among the old volumes of Mr Punch, we shall find many a quip and crank cut at its owner's expense. But time is a quick mover and many of us are fated to outlive our reputations and thus, though at one time Mr Wilde, the old gentleman, of whom we are going to give our readers a brief account, was in his way quite a celebrity; today his star is set, his fame obscured in this busy changeable city.³⁹

This joke turns upon Wilde's real celebrity at this period, of course, but underlying Beerbohm's philosophic explanation of Wilde's position is his awareness of his own youth in relation to Wilde's maturity. He, along with Beardsley and Rothenstein, all born in 1872, were the new generation, challenging the established public figures.

Later on Beerbohm again addresses Wilde's plagiarism, describing his body of work with feigned candour as 'a book of parodies upon Rossetti, a few fairy-tales in the manner of Hans Andersen, an experimental novel in the style of Poe, a volume of essays, which Mr Pater is often obliged blushing to repudiate, a French play written in collaboration with M. Louÿs and one or two English ones in collaboration with Mr G. R. Sims.'⁴⁰ The works referred to are plainly identifiable as Wilde's *Poems*, his collection of stories *A House of Pomegranates*, his novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the essays and dialogues *Intentions* and the plays

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Max Beerbohm, *A Peep into the Past and Other Prose Pieces*, ed. by Rupert Hart-Davis (London: Heinemann, 1972), p. 3. In a note Hart-Davis reports 'Written in December 1893 or very early in 1894 when Max was an undergraduate of twenty-one, and Oscar Wilde, at the height of his success, was thirty-nine. On the manuscript, beneath the title, Max wrote: "For the 1st No. of the *Yellow Book*" (though he later forgot this, and denied that the essay was so intended). When the first number appeared in April 1894 Max's contribution was "A Defence of Cosmetics." A year later Wilde's downfall made "A Peep into the Past" unpublishable, and its only appearance has been in an unauthorised edition of 300 copies, published in New York in 1923.'

Salomé, *Lady Windermere's Fan* and *A Woman of No Importance*. Beerbohm's brazen identification of Wilde's sources constitutes a much stronger attack than the subtle, if disingenuous, plea for tolerance in the earlier 'Oscar Wilde'.

Wilde's homosexuality is also strongly alluded to in two instances in 'A Peep into the Past'. The first is an encoded reference: 'Himself most regular in his habits, he is something of a martinet about punctuality in his household and perhaps this accounts for the constant succession of page-boys, which so startles the neighbourhood.'⁴¹ Beerbohm's delicate 'perhaps' opens the observation up to admit an alternative explanation, that these are rent boys, although it remains tacit. As I go on to discuss in the following section on 'Enter Herodias', page boys, telegraph boys and messenger boys were sufficiently connected with male prostitutes in the minds of Beardsley, Beerbohm and Ross, and to a large degree in the public consciousness, for the joke to be understood. Beerbohm's second reference is more explicit: 'As I was ushered into the little study, I fancied that I heard the quickly receding frou-frou of tweed trousers, but my host I found reclining, hale and hearty, though a little dishevelled, upon the sofa. With one hand readjusting the nut-brown Georgian wig that he is accustomed to wear, he motioned me with a courteous gesture of the other to an arm-chair.'⁴²

The probable collaboration between Beardsley and Beerbohm before and during the *Salomé* commission is made even more plausible by Beerbohm's decorations in the margins of two of his own copies of Wilde's books in stylistic emulation of Beardsley. His first edition of *Intentions* (1891) is decorated on fifteen pages with the following drawings, as described in the sale catalogue of Beerbohm's library:

- (1) *On first fly-leaf*: an aerial Oscar Wilde, top-hatted, strumming a lyre with one hand and holding a quill dropping ink in the other.
- (2) *On second fly-leaf*: an elaborate composition containing figures of an Irish peasant, a Frenchman, a University Don precariously perched on a Lexicon, two Dandies, an elegant woman, an Oriental with scimitar and hookah, etc., all drawn round the Muse on a column.
- (3) *On reverse of second fly-leaf*: a figure astride a bracket blowing a trumpet.
- (4) *On imprint leaf*: a garden path blocked by a gate; Oscar Wilde looking over the fence.
- (5) *On reverse of imprint leaf*: Oscar Wilde flying through the air holding a model of the Parthenon; in the landscape below John Bull with bow and

⁴⁰ G. R. Sims was a playwright and a hack translator of French texts into English novels and plays.

⁴¹ *A Peep into the Past*, p. 4.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

quiver following a twisted arrow he has shot in an attempt to bring him down.

(6) *On title-page*: a full-length figure of Oscar Wilde on a column, two maidens, carrying laurel and a quill, flying towards him, etc.

(7) *On reverse of title*: a Jester in a mountainous landscape containing a castle.

(8) *Contents leaf*: grotesques, etc.

(9) *Fly-title to 'The decay of lying'*: a grotesque animal.

(10) *Reverse of fly-title*: a design illustrating the subject of the essay, containing figures of a John Bull holding up a mirror, an elegant figure reading, a grotesque animal, a doll, etc.

(11) *Fly-title to 'Pen, pencil and poison'*: a grotesque mermaid rising from the sea.

(12) *Reverse of fly-title*: a Dandy (representing the poisoner Wainwright) perched on a palette on a column.

(13) *At the end of 'Pen, pencil and poison'*: a dragon and a maiden armed with a sword.

(14) *At the end of 'The truth about masks' [sic.]*: Oscar Wilde in the heavens, holding a torch and surrounded by stars.

(15) *On end-leaf*: Oscar Wilde reclining in a gondola, etc.⁴³

Beerbohm's edition of the 1893 French edition of *Salomé* is similarly decorated, again in the Beardsley manner, as follows:

(1) *On first fly-leaf*: Oscar Wilde in the skies, top-hatted and strumming a lyre, surrounded by stars (figure 12)

(2) *On half-title*: Oscar Wilde floating in the air, holding the half-title as a banner in front of himself.

(3) *On title-page*: small fleurons added to the title word.

(4) *First leaf of text*: in the top corners John Bull and a British policeman; in the lower margin two floating figures, male and female, representing gaiety, holding parachutes which have been blown down by John Bull and the policeman.⁴⁴

Beerbohm had a habit of decorating (or in his own word 'improving') his books, but the coincidence of his decoration of Wilde's books in Beardsley's manner - with a number of caricatures of Wilde himself - seems likely to be a conspiratorial response to Beardsley's official commission.

In 1893 Beerbohm also jokes about the undramatic qualities of *Salomé*, which seems to have been a standing joke throughout the period that the illustrations were being produced. In a letter to Rothenstein on 24th August 1893 Beerbohm writes: 'I have just been reading [*Salomé*] again - and like it immensely - there is much, I think, in it that is beautiful, much lovely writing - I almost wonder Oscar

⁴³ Messrs Sotheby & Co., *Catalogue of the Library and Literary Manuscripts of the Late Sir Max Beerbohm Removed from Rapallo* (London: Sotheby & Co., 1960), pp. 67-69. Beerbohm's copy of *Intentions* is now in the William Andrews Clark Memorial Library in Los Angeles.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 69-70.

doesn't dramatise it.'⁴⁵ In Beerbohm's essay 'A Peep into the Past' he makes the joke again: '[Mr. Wilde] has not abandoned his old intention of dramatising *Salomé*...'⁴⁶ As Beerbohm was aware, Beardsley was taking it upon himself to 'dramatise' the play.

As well as this frequent literary attention, the many caricatures which Beerbohm drew of Wilde during this period are evidence of his mingled fascination and impulse to satirize him. It is in his literary work, however, that his three principal targets are plainest: plagiarism, homosexuality and outdatedness. As I will go on to argue, these are also three principal targets at which Beardsley aims in the *Salomé* illustrations.

Beardsley as Satirist

Throughout Beardsley's work satirical elements are much in evidence. Every commentator has noted the prevalence of visual jokes, often sexual, which occur in ostensibly serious illustrations postdating Beardsley's juvenilia. To take a very few examples, many of his illustrations to the *Morte Darthur* contain visual jokes, for instance the design for the heading of Chapter XXI, Book I, in which a griffin seems about to mount an angel, who lies at the bottom of the image with her head in her hands and a frustrated expression on her face (figure 13), and the many breast shapes which appear on tree-trunks or in border designs. The first version of the design Beardsley made for the front cover of the *Savoy*, the magazine for which he became the art editor after having been sacked from his comparable position at the *Yellow Book* as a result of Wilde's arrest, features a putto which urinates on a copy of the *Yellow Book* lying on the ground at its feet (figure 14). Similarly, in the first version of the design for the front cover of the prospectus for the *Savoy* John Bull's erect penis is discernible in the folds of his trousers (figure 15). There are a great number of such satirical intrusions throughout Beardsley's oeuvre. An abiding aim seems to have been to *épater les bourgeois*; as Arthur Symons wrote in 1898, '[Beardsley] had an immense contempt for the public, and the desire to kick that public into admiration, and then to kick it for admiring the wrong thing or not knowing why it was admiring, led him into many of his most outrageous practical jokes of the pen.'⁴⁷

⁴⁵ *Max and Will*, p. 18.

⁴⁶ *A Peep into the Past*, p. 4.

⁴⁷ Arthur Symons, 'Aubrey Beardsley', *Fortnightly Review*, 63 (1898), 752-61 (p. 754).

As Snodgrass has convincingly argued, Beardsley was fundamentally an ironist, and undercutting elements pervade his work.⁴⁸ Yet despite this attention the real extent of Beardsley's early satirical work, and his self-perception as a caricaturist at the outset of his career, have never been fully acknowledged. Beardsley's drawings leading up to *Salomé* reveal a strong interest in satire, and a great proportion of his early work is represented by comic sketches and caricatures. Much of this juvenilia was published for the first time by Lane in 1925 in *The Uncollected Work of Aubrey Beardsley*. This volume is an important addition to the previous collections, the *Early Work* of 1899 and the *Later Work* of 1901, which only include finished works, and indeed to the most widely used reference book today, Reade's *Aubrey Beardsley*, which also excludes the majority of these early comic sketches and caricature drawings. Through the material published in the *Uncollected Work* it is possible to build up a more comprehensive picture of Beardsley's attitude and interests in the period leading up to *Salomé*, which was a pivotal work in his career, separating the juvenilia, the frequently experimental and grotesque drawings and the pastiches of Burne-Jones and William Morris which he produced up to the end of 1893 from the bolder, more confident and innovative work from the *Yellow Book* period onwards.

As the *Uncollected Work* demonstrates, as a schoolboy Beardsley drew a great number of comic drawings, including a long series, made when he was fourteen, illustrating Virgil's *Aeneid* (figure 16).⁴⁹ He also made many caricatures of his schoolmasters in undignified poses, a series of illustrations for a school production of the comic operetta of 'The Pied Piper' in 1888, comic lantern slides to illustrate school lectures and a large number of humorous programmes for 'Home Entertainments'. He also caricatured public figures - the MP Charles Bradlaugh in 1886 and Paganini in 1888. The *Uncollected Work* also reproduces a number of the comic letter drawings which Beardsley produced throughout his life.

An early drawing inscribed 'The Angler's Metamorphose: a dream after a Day's Sport' (c. 1888/89) (figure 17) demonstrates Beardsley's knowledge of historical caricature, being an emulation of a form of caricature drawing used in the early nineteenth century by Philipon, the editor of *Lacaricature*, and by other French satirists such as Traviés, Grandville and Daumier, in which frame by frame

⁴⁸ Snodgrass, *Aubrey Beardsley*, p. 23.

⁴⁹ *The Uncollected Work of Aubrey Beardsley* (London: John Lane, 1925), numbers 84-88, and 129-157.



an image is transformed into a symbolic representation of it.⁵⁰ One of the most famous of these images shows Louis-Philippe's head gradually metamorphosing into a pear, 'poire' being a slang term for idiot.⁵¹ Beerbohm also referred back to this French mode of caricature in an undated drawing of Whistler, who frame by frame is transformed into a candlestick (figure 18).

This interest in producing satirical drawings became commercially rewarding when in early 1893 Beardsley was employed by the *Pall Mall Budget* to produce weekly caricatures. His concern at this time with establishing a reputation as a caricaturist, rather than as an illustrator, is apparent in a letter to his old school-friend G.F Scotson-Clark of around February 15th 1893, when he writes:

My weekly work in the *Pall Mall Budget* has created some astonishment as nobody gave me credit for caricature and wash-work, but I have blossomed out into both styles and already far distanced the old men at that sort of thing. Of course the wash drawings are most impressionist, and the caricatures in wiry outline.⁵²

The *Pall Mall Budget* of February 23rd 1893 includes Beardsley's caricatures of Arthur Cecil as Baron Stein in *Diplomacy*, a play which was currently on at the Garrick, and Forbes Robertson as Julian Beauclerc in the same play, and a comic drawing of old and new approaches to pilgrimage (figures 19, 20 and 21). That of March 30th includes his satire of military innovation 'Bullet Proof Uniform: Tommy Atkins thinks it rather fun' (figure 22). All of these are drawn with a loose hand in a sketchy and impressionistic style. The broad humour of the two cartoons is conventional for popular magazines of the day, and the two caricatures conform to contemporary modes of caricatural representation, with very little exaggeration of features. A great number of similar caricatures of actors in rôle were produced by Harry Furniss and other leading cartoonists of the time.

Beardsley's letter to Scotson-Clark reveals that he is consciously pitting his *Pall Mall Budget* work against magazine work done by 'the old men', or 'the old black-and-white duffers' as he calls them later in the same letter, artists such as May, Du Maurier, Keene, Furniss and Partridge. Yet it is significant that he is aware of working in the same context. He is not opposing their style or subject matter, in the way that he does with drawings such as 'J'ai Baisé ta Bouche

⁵⁰ This previously unknown drawing by Beardsley is published as lot 145 in the Christie's auction catalogue *British Art on Paper including Original Book Illustrations*, Thursday 13 June 2002, p. 49.

⁵¹ See Beatrice Farwell, *The Charged Image: French Lithographic Culture 1816-1848* (California: Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 1989), p. 153.

Iokanaan' or 'Of a Neophyte and how the Black Art was revealed unto him by the Fiend Asomuel' (published in the *Pall Mall Magazine* in June 1893), but adapting their methods for this particular kind of cartoon work. Beardsley was certainly aware of working in a variety of different modes - he writes in his letter to Scotson-Clark that he has 'seven distinct styles' and that he has 'won success in all of them' - and he used these distinct styles for different kinds of pictures. Caricature work and comic drawings were one distinct category of production.⁵³ It is plausible that in 1893, before the success of *Salomé* and of the *Yellow Book*, Beardsley might have expected to continue working largely or even principally as a cartoonist.

I want to suggest that in *Salomé* Beardsley attempted a modal synthesis, inserting the comic ideas and caricatures which had played such a large part in his work up to this point into his illustrative work. As I have said, this kind of synthesis was not exclusive to *Salomé*. Yet the difference between these earlier examples and *Salomé* is that in the *Salomé* illustrations satire is a driving force, not an incidental subversive gesture, and the object of criticism - Wilde - is systematically lampooned throughout the sequence.

This decision to caricature Wilde and to satirize his play was probably not the result of any specific instance of conflict between the two men. The evidence of their relationship, which mostly consists of reported barbed witticisms which passed between them, suggests that their friendship was always a wary one.⁵⁴ However, not only is much of this information culled from unreliable sources, it is also likely to add up to a greatly condensed and distorted picture when things said over a period of two or more years are put together in one or two anecdotal pages, as happens in most accounts.⁵⁵ Unfortunately there is insufficient evidence to do more than to conclude that one of the features of their acquaintance was a degree of sparring, usually instigated by Beardsley. Beardsley's satirical agenda in *Salomé* was probably motivated partly by his delight in parodying authority figures and

⁵² *The Letters of Aubrey Beardsley*, p. 44.

⁵³ Some of the other styles he used at this time are the 'mediaeval' manner in emulation of William Morris which he used for the *Morte Darthur*; that which he calls his 'entirely new method of drawing and composition, something suggestive of Japan, but not really japoneseque' (*ibid.*); his Burne-Jones style, which he used in 'Hamlet Patris Manem Sequitur' and 'Hail Mary'; wash drawings perhaps in emulation of Whistler; and a detailed chiaroscuro pencil style which he used in drawings such as 'Paganini' and 'Ibsen's Ghosts'.

⁵⁴ See Snodgrass, *Aubrey Beardsley*, pp. 115-116.

⁵⁵ This is the case, for instance, in Guy Deghy and Keith Waterhouse, *Café Royal: Ninety Years of Bohemia* (London: Hutchinson, 1955), pp. 62-64. The authors' aims here are similar to John Betjeman's in poems such as 'On Seeing an Old Poet at the Café Royal', and 'The Arrest of Oscar Wilde at the Cadogan Hotel', to create a poetic impression of an age, rather than to relate factual events as they occurred. Yet Snodgrass repeatedly cites the book as though it is an accurate historical source (*Aubrey Beardsley*, pp. 114-115).

canonical texts, just as he had done with his schoolmasters and with the *Aeneid* several years previously. It also seems to be contingent upon his friendship with Beerbohm, who as I have argued also satirized Wilde strongly without harbouring any real dislike.

Beardsley's satirical agenda was probably also motivated by self-interest. He must have seen that he would make his name professionally by creating a *succès de scandale* with a book by one of the most famous and controversial writers of the era. He also took the opportunity created by the commission to establish his position in relation to Wilde's social circle as a witty and erudite young sophisticate. Beardsley was intensely resistant to becoming another admiring face in the band of young men who surrounded Wilde, a group parodically characterised by Beerbohm as 'exquisite Æolian harps that play in the breeze of his matchless talk',⁵⁶ and by sparring with the master in a public arena he sought to establish his own position as an *agent provocateur*.

Satirical Devices

Before going on to analyse individual illustrations in detail, I will first identify some of the principal satirical devices to which Beardsley resorts in *Salomé*. Satire has a number of conventional modes of expression, and my aim here is to establish in general terms what these modes are. This groundwork is intended to underpin my analysis, in the following chapter, of the jokes which Beardsley makes about various aspects of Wilde's character and about his play. Some of these jokes are extremely detailed and subtle, as well as being heterogenous, yet they all operate within the framework of conventional satirical devices.

To begin on a relatively abstract note, Beardsley's illustrations for *Salomé* share common structural ground with satire. One of the principal features of the *Salomé* illustrations, and one of the major problems for criticism, is that they are discontinuous and incoherent as a suite of drawings, both formally and in terms of their subject matter, and in this they depart radically from the desired 'harmony' of contemporaneous book illustration. Some images are densely packed with decoration (the title-page design), others veer towards modernist abstraction with audacious areas of blank space ('The Woman in the Moon' and 'A Platonic Lament'). There are references to Japanese wood-block prints ('The Black Cape'), to classical iconography (the terminal god of the title page), and to the English aesthetic movement of the 1880s (the Godwin-style furniture, china ornaments and

⁵⁶ Max Beerbohm, 'Oscar Wilde', p. 287.

lilies of the first version of 'The Toilette of Salomé'). Thematic unity and formal clarity are not often qualities found in satire either, which by its nature is scabrous, unpredictable and transgressive. The very derivations of satire confirm this: firstly, satire is derived from *lanx satura* (literally 'full dish'), a dish containing different kinds of offerings of fruit; secondly from a kind of food stuffing, in the same way that 'farce' comes from the Italian *farsa*, or stuffing, or 'farrago' means 'mixed fodder'. So the common theme is of a mixture, a random assortment. This discontinuity within a group of illustrations is unique in Beardsley's oeuvre.

More specifically, interrupting the given narrative as a way of debunking the authority of the author is one of the satirist's tools.⁵⁷ In the *Salomé* sequence, whilst we find that some illustrations ostensibly follow Wilde's narrative, others, like 'The Black Cape' or 'The Toilette of Salomé', take an independent course. This demonstrates the illustrator's power to intervene; it implies that the illustrative narrative is an improvement upon the textual one; by presenting another fiction it also calls into question the validity of the original fiction.

The application of a Japanesque style to a Biblical, Middle-Eastern theme is a tool of satire. The effect of the incongruity is to create a disjuncture between text and illustration; even when the illustration seems to perform its task and correspond to the text, its stylistic appearance works against such obedience, and calls this performance into question.

Related to this are the frequent anachronisms in Beardsley's illustrations. The modern rooms in both versions of 'The Toilette of Salomé' are the most strikingly anachronistic feature: the window and the blind; the Godwin furniture; the books, which range from Latin decadent authors, to nineteenth-century decadent and realist authors; the aesthetic paraphernalia; Salomé's clothes in the second version; the modern fashion plate posture of the woman in 'The Black Cape'. With their sharp specificity these elements operate satirically in order to puncture the mystical, nebulous world created by Wilde. Simultaneously, they make a satirical point about what Beardsley considered to be Wilde's real mental furniture: about the failure of his writing to transcend the temporal concerns of aestheticism and Symbolism, and about *Salomé*'s relation to Wilde's popular comedies and society plays, which were set in such modern surroundings.

One of the most striking aspects of these illustrations, and another characteristic of satire, is incongruity. The classical imagery on the title page,

⁵⁷ See Michele Hannoosh, *Parody and Decadence: Laforgue's Moralités légendaires* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1989), p. 26.

Priapus and a kneeling acolyte, is in the context of a Biblical, Middle-Eastern narrative inappropriate. Most illustrations are undercut by an incongruous element: the ostensible melancholy of the mourning scene in 'A Platonic Lament' is debunked twice, once by the strange, grotesque figure beneath the young Syrian's platform, and once by the appearance of Wilde's face caricatured in the moon; the foregrounding, in 'The Peacock Skirt', on the skirt itself rather than the action. The ostensible seriousness of 'The Stomach Dance' is undercut by the libidinous leer of the musician, and the horror of 'The Dancer's Reward' is offset by the presence of the delicate slippers which hover behind Salomé.

This undercutting incongruity is also carried out by the astonishing array of obscene details which appear throughout the sequence of illustrations: the large phallus of the hydrocephalic attendant in 'Enter Herodias', and the phallic candlesticks below; Salomé's masturbatory reverie in the first version of 'The Toilette of Salomé', and the masturbating attendant in this same image; the genitals of the figures in the original title page, and the sexual drama implied; the erect penis of the musician in 'The Stomach Dance'; the position of Salomé's feet in the groin of the satyr in the tailpiece. I would argue that the sexual details in the illustrations are not, as has often been claimed, erotic, as they do not set out to titillate. They seem to operate within the meaning structure of satirical images rather than that of erotic images, in that they work to mock or undercut the ostensible drama of the scene. However, the two genres share a great deal of common ground and frequently use the same imagery.

The synthesis of sex and satire has a long history, from Aristophanes's *Lysistrata* to Carry On films and beyond. The balance between the two when they are combined is a shifting one; in these examples comedy is at the fore and sexual activity remains potential because amorous designs are constantly thwarted, with ensuing loss of dignity. In terms of visual history, a great many erotic or even pornographic images are touched by comic absurdity.⁵⁸ This is particularly evident in the erotic prints of Thomas Rowlandson, which achieve a fairly even balance between eroticism and comedy. The style in which these images are executed is identical to that used in his non-sexual satirical images, with vigorous contour lines and exaggeratedly bulging bodies and distorted physiognomies. An image such as *Departure of the Husband* (c. 1815), in which a woman simultaneously waves to a departing ship through an open window and copulates with her lover who is concealed below the window sill, sets out both to amuse and mildly to titillate

⁵⁸ See Eduard Fuchs, *Das Erotische Element in der Karikatur* (Munich: Langen, 1904).

(figure 23). Sexual behaviour is treated in the same way as any other subject, and sent up as it is depicted. In the work of Félicien Rops, the balance swings the other way, and pornographic images are often attended by a cruel and savage humour, for example in 'Impudence', where a laughing monkey perches behind the looking glass in which a woman surveys her naked body, or they tend towards absurdity, as in 'Le Velocipède' (figure 24).⁵⁹

In another kind of image an erect penis is a satirical event in itself, with little if any vestigial erotic signification. The fool has often been identified as a cock, both in the sense of a vain, strutting fowl and in the sense of male genitalia. Fools 'carried a bauble that was sometimes in the shape of a phallus with the small head of a fool, a cock or an ass, with bells attached',⁶⁰ and medieval representations of fools sometimes added a phallus and testicles to the front of his traditional three-cornered hat.⁶¹ The phallus as a comedic rather than sexual signifier has a long history. The convention of Ancient Greek drama was for comic actors to wear the phallus, and this legacy lived on in the figure of Mr Punch, whose attributes of a hump on his back shaped like a codpiece, a pointed hat, a protuberant nose and chin and a stick are all phallic symbols.⁶² In a plate from Jacques Callot's *Balli di Sfessania* (c. 1621/22), alongside various representations of carnivalesque absurdity a captain appears on the far left of the image whose sword is placed to resemble a long thin erect penis.⁶³ The musician's sexual arousal in 'The Stomach Dance' is a case in point. His exposure has an affinity with mooning or flashing, as a comedic show of coarseness and disrespect for 'proper' behaviour.

Sexual jokes in the shape of visual puns or symbols are another established tool of sexual/satirical images. In the eighteenth century in particular a whole system of sexual emblems was established, and in the work of Hogarth, Rowlandson and Gillray, amongst many other artists, objects such as candles, candlesticks, scrolls, canes and pokers represented male organs, whilst objects such as hats, muffs, pockets, shoes and gloves suggested female genitalia. In Gillray's 'Presentation of the Mahometan Credentials' (figure 25) the ambassador's scroll is misread as a

⁵⁹ It is arguable, in fact, that what are considered to be Rops's most graphically pornographic images are more accurately categorized as brutal caricatures of human character; the slavery to sexual imperative which he obsessively depicts is treated as an illustration of human vice and folly, and not as an end in itself, which is the hallmark of true pornography.

⁶⁰ James Laver, *Costume in the Theatre* (London: George Harrap, 1964), pp. 45-46.

⁶¹ Timothy Hyman and Roger Malbert, *Carnivalesque* (London: Hayward Gallery Publishing, 2000), p. 25.

⁶² See M. H. Spielmann, *The History of 'Punch'* (London: Cassell, 1895), p. 7, for various representations of Mr Punch.

⁶³ In his biography Ross records that Beardsley was 'a student of Callot.' (Robert Ross, *Aubrey Beardsley* (London: John Lane, 1909), p. 54.)

phallus by a comedically horrified and embarrassed audience; their susceptibility to this lewd misreading in a serious political situation is a joke that plays upon a vulgar dirty-mindedness which their social positions should place them above. There are many comedic sexual emblems throughout the *Salomé* illustrations: the crutch-like end of the caduceus which Wilde holds in 'Enter Herodias' which projects from the right-hand edge of the image, combined with the curiously uneven silhouette of the snake's body below it, form the contour of an erect penis and scrotum, and the candlesticks at the bottom of the image are literally represented as penises. There are also a number of instances in which hanging folds of fabric resemble breasts; this is particularly apparent in the first version of 'The Toilette of Salomé' in which the pierrot's coat tails are an exaggerated echo of Salomé's exposed breasts. The most daring and obscene of these visual jokes, as I will go on to describe in the next chapter, occurs in 'The Peacock Skirt'.

Another attribute of these illustrations common to satirical images is caricature. As I have described, caricature was the most frequent form in which Wilde was represented in the media throughout the 1880s and early 1890s. Four caricatural representations of Wilde appear in the *Salomé* illustrations: he appears as the author of the play in 'Enter Herodias', his face appears in the moon in the frontispiece drawing 'The Woman in the Moon' and again in 'A Platonic Lament', and he is Herod in 'The Eyes of Herod'. In accordance with the nineteenth-century convention of caricature images his features are not distorted in these instances, and jokes are made through the addition of props or through anthropomorphic transformation.

Grotesque faces and bodies are intrinsic to satiric images, and ugly, deformed physiognomy was traditionally used to represent vice or the rejection of the respectable and the proper, from Leonardo da Vinci's hideous grotesques to Gillray's depictions of elderly roués.⁶⁴ The cast of 'extras' which Beardsley introduces into the illustrations - the winged figures in the title page and border designs, the hydrocephalic attendant whose face is deformed and foetal in 'Enter Herodias', the warty dwarfs in 'A Platonic Lament' and 'The Stomach Dance' and the clown and satyr in the tailpiece design all conform to this comedic convention. These depictions are a convention of carnival imagery, heirs to the medieval grylli and later dwarf figures, celebrations of deformity. As Timothy Hyman observes, the carnival grotesque body, parading its lumpy extensions, pregnant with liquids,

⁶⁴ See Diana Donald, *The Age of Caricature: Satirical Prints in the Reign of George III* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), pp. 9-10.

is a conscious repudiation of the Renaissance body in which all protuberances are smoothed down, all apertures closed.⁶⁵ Beardsley's many gestures towards the carnivalesque, towards the grotesque repertoire of Breugel, Callot, Giambattista Tiepolo and Goya, is a gesture of insubordination, as the premise of the carnival is the inversion of normal power relations and hierarchies. By peopling his images with carnival grotesques Beardsley subjects Wilde's play to the rules of a Saturnalia, in which the lowly illustrator attains the licence to profane, travesty and outspoke the powerful author's solemn work.

Another satirical tool which Beardsley exploits frequently here is bathos. In the context of Wilde's Symbolist play, with its insistence upon the great themes of desire and death, then the introduction of Salomé in a late nineteenth-century room at her toilette, and the depiction of fashionable modern costume in 'The Black Cape', are bathetic because they puncture Wilde's sublime intentions with the commonplace and, in the context, the absurd. In literature bathos occurs when the second part of a literary construct does not match up to the ambitious or noble aspirations of its predecessor; as an illustrator coming to a completed play with his contributions Beardsley is ideally placed to apply a deliberately bathetic secondary narrative.

The insistence of the *Salomé* illustrations upon these structural devices of discontinuity, interruption, incongruity, obscenity, visual puns, grotesquerie, caricature and bathos aligns them firmly with a tradition of satirical images. The analysis of individual illustrations which follows intends to demonstrate the extent and the consistency of Beardsley's satiric scheme, and to propose radical reinterpretations of his iconography.

⁶⁵ Hyman and Malbert, p. 17.

Chapter III

‘Under the Microscope, Sideways and Upside Down’: The *Salomé* Illustrations

This thesis is concerned with the 1894 edition of *Salomé*, and as a result I have chosen to discuss the images in the order in which they appear in this book, with the addition in the sequence of the rejected first version of ‘The Toilette of Salomé’. ‘John and Salomé’, another rejected design, is discussed at the end of the sequence, as is ‘Salomé on Settle’.

A section is devoted to each image, and each of these sections is divided by subheadings. These brief headings relate to the traditional satirical strategies which Beardsley employs, such as caricature or visual puns, or describe specific sallies against Wilde, in which, for example, his plagiarism or homosexuality is attacked, or describe any other kind of confrontational stance adopted by Beardsley. These subheadings represent a strategy of organising material which, although at times repetitive, is by its nature extremely heterogeneous.

Most sections contain a description of the image in question, which in the case of these illustrations is an essential starting point for analysis, since they have been subjected to so many differing and often erroneous interpretations.

Section i

The Woman in the Moon¹ (figure 26)

As the frontispiece to *Salomé*, 'The Woman in the Moon' has significant standing amongst the group of illustrations; not only is it the first illustration encountered by the reader, but the frontispiece also has a sort of ambassadorial status in relation both to the text and to the following illustrations. Yet whilst this illustration fulfils the conventional reader's expectations of illustrative behaviour in that it depicts a recurrent scene in the play, characters looking at the moon, it is also characterised by a number of visual jokes on the theme of Wilde's homosexuality and his cultural status, and by a sexual narrative, elements which prefigure Beardsley's satirical activities in the other illustrations. In the course of this discussion I will analyse these subversive components.

Incongruity

'The Woman in the Moon', on the left hand opening, faces the title page on the right. Stylistically they present a great contrast. The title page is all vegetal profusion and direct ocular challenge, the frontispiece all cool abstraction and sidelong glances. This pairing serves to prepare the reader for the diversity of the illustrations to follow, and for the different demands they will make, setting the agenda for a series of shocks to come; he or she is not going to be lulled with undemanding, homogenous decoration.

This image, more strongly than any other in the *Salomé* sequence, sets forth the new stylistic agenda which Beardsley began to develop at this time: it is constructed of three elements: broad flat areas of black, large areas of blank white space, and fine contour lines. Formally, this drawing pushes decoration towards

¹ There has always been some confusion about the title of this illustration, despite it being named 'The Woman in the Moon' in the 1894 edition of *Salomé*. In his 1928 biography of Beardsley MacFall remarks that 'Beardsley showed by his *Book of Fifty Drawings* that his title was "The Man in the Moon", not as the publishers have it, "The Woman in the Moon"'. (MacFall, p. 52.) Yet MacFall does not record a telling discrepancy: in the contents list of *A Book of Fifty Drawings* the drawing is entitled 'The Man in the Moon', whereas in Aymer Vallance's iconography at the back of the book it is entitled 'The Woman in the Moon'. What MacFall does not record - indeed, at this point had no way of knowing - is that there is evidence in Beardsley's letters that he thoroughly checked Vallance's iconography, but that there is no evidence that he saw the contents list before it was published. Moreover, since the *Book of Fifty Drawings* was published by Smithers in 1897, during the period of Wilde's imprisonment, I think it likely that the title was altered for the contents list in order to lessen its implications of Wilde's homosexuality. A parallel compunction was shown by several of Beardsley's fellow caricaturists. Hichens withdrew his satirical novel *The Green Carnation* after Wilde's imprisonment, and Beerbohm regretted the crueller of the caricatures he had made of Wilde, when in May 1895 he joined a deputation to Scotland Yard in order to petition for the prison conditions to be ameliorated whilst Wilde was held on remand; on the wall of the inspector's room he found one of his own caricatures of Wilde, displayed as though it constituted evidence. (Cecil, pp. 120-121; Matthew Sturgis, *Passionate Attitudes: The English Decadence of the 1890s* (London: MacMillan, 1995), p. 248.)

abstraction. The sky and the ground are barely distinguished from one another. In the centre of the drawing, between the streak of black sky and the balancing line which shoots out from the second figure's robe and thickens as it turns, is a vertiginous expanse of unbroken white space. Two figures stand on the right hand side of the illustration. They both gaze at the moon, which appears in the top left hand corner of the image. In the area surrounding the moon are scudding cloud formations, which divide the area into broad bands of black and white. Beardsley's bold signature appears in the bottom right hand corner, giving balancing weight to this area.

The left hand figure is nude, apart from a cloak which is draped over his left shoulder. The contour of this boy's body is regular, continuous and fine. In contrast with the conventional way in which illustrators represented the nude during this period, here the definition of the genitals and of the nipples with their pronounced aureolæ is extraordinary. The convention in book illustration of this period, largely established by Burne-Jones, and followed by Charles Ricketts, Charles Shannon, Laurence Housman, Walter Crane and Robert Anning Bell amongst others, was either to drape the genital area, or to position the figure so that it was hidden. If the area was displayed, it was usual to play down the nudity with shading and the contours of muscles so that the genital area was as little distinguished from the rest of the body as possible, and the penis and scrotum, in the rare occasions upon which they were revealed at all, were suggested as a formless lump, as though the model - if models had been used for this kind of work - had worn a concealing *cache-sexe*.² A contemporary example of this is apparent in Ricketts's frontispiece to *Hero and Leander* of 1894 (figure 27). Both male and female nipples were either elided or lightly suggested.

This was the first time Beardsley had drawn in this idiom; nudes, other than conventional putti, occur rarely in his work before the *Salomé* project. 'How King Mark found Sir Tristram Sleeping' drawn for *Le Morte Darthur* in 1893 (figure 28) is one early example, and here his drawing bows to conventional modes of representation, in which the contours of any bodily detail, but particularly genital areas, are reduced and softened by the presence of auxiliary lines. The nipples are suggested by incomplete circles, and their prominence, even though they lack aureolæ, is mitigated by the presence of two lines to indicate the armpit, and a chevron to mark the middle of the chest. Similarly, the figure's genitals are drawn according to contemporary illustrative convention: parallel lines on each side of the groin tone down the conspicuousness of this area, and the penis and scrotum are

² Male models usually wore a loin cloth or a *cache-sexe* in London art schools such as the Slade School of Fine Art and the Royal Academy until well into the twentieth century. See Martin Postle and William Vaughan, *The Artist's Model from Etty to Spencer* (London: Merrell Holberton, 1999).

blended into the surrounding area. There is even a crease in the figure's thigh, which echoes the shape of the penis, and in doing so directs attention away from it. 'The Woman in the Moon' attempts no such evasion. There are no lines to divert attention away from the shape of the boy's penis, navel or nipples; on the contrary, these areas attract attention through the very accuracy and deliberation with which they are drawn. His masculinity is compromised by this clear depiction of his erogenous areas, as during the late nineteenth century such sexualised representations were usually reserved for the female nude.

The precedents for this outline drawing are to be found in ancient Greek vase painting, with which Beardsley was familiar at this time. Depictions of boys on Greek vases tend to be made with a strong contour line, and, as in 'The Woman in the Moon', the nipples and genitals are depicted clearly, with no attempt made at concealing or playing down the prominence of these areas. Similarly, the neo-classical illustrator John Flaxman, whose books were reprinted many times throughout the nineteenth century, developed a style based on Greek models which employed a muscular outline and a small number of schematic contour lines within this outline.³ Using a classic tool of parody Beardsley takes a canonical style and applies it inappropriately, replicating severe classical and neo-classical lineaments with a mischievous emphasis upon erogenous areas, when Wilde had in mind the Romantic, elaborate and shadowy decoration of Gustave Moreau's depictions of Salomé to match what, according to both Ricketts's and Rothenstein's memoirs, he thought of as the 'Byzantine' quality of his play.⁴

Homosexuality

This figure turns his head in order to look at the moon, so that although his body is in three quarter profile his face is in full profile. His expression is apprehensive, eyebrow raised and lips slightly parted as he gazes at the moon. His gesture mirrors this apprehension, as one arm is held protectively across his chest, and the other reaches behind him as though to shield and protect his companion from the moon's searching gaze. His feet slope, as though he stands on tiptoe, and his slightly bent legs reinforce this hesitancy, as though his movement has been arrested.

³ See Bell. Bell makes many compelling comparisons between Beardsley's and Flaxman's work which suggest that Beardsley used Flaxman's illustrations to the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* as models. Bell's argument is to be approached cautiously, however, since it is based not upon historical evidence that Beardsley worked from Flaxman's illustrations but upon a theory that Beardsley might have been Flaxman's reincarnation (p. 274).

⁴ Ricketts, *Oscar Wilde*, pp. 51-52; William Rothenstein, *Men and Memories: Recollections of William Rothenstein 1872 - 1900*, 2 vols (London: Faber & Faber, 1931), I, p. 184. The line block would not, of course, allow reproduction of tone. However, its capacity to reproduce fine lines and large black planes offered immense scope to the illustrator (Beardsley was one of the few illustrators of the time to take advantage of this), and a neo-classical contour line was not an inevitable consequence of this technological advance.

The companion, who stands on the far right of the image, is of ambiguous gender. He or she wears a robe of such flowing material that it completely obscures the shape of the body. The profile is more feminine than that of the nude figure, as the lips are full and the head meekly inclined. These feminine attributes are thrown into question by the bared chest (although in fact there are no lines here by which to navigate). The tassel which hangs elegantly down the figure's front, its position corresponding precisely to its penile counterpart to the left, could be read as a phallic symbol; conversely, its triangular shape can equally be read as an upside-down female pudendum. The textual evidence suggests that these are male interlocutors, as this image seems to illustrate the very beginning of the play, in which the young Syrian Narraboth and the timid and apprehensive page of Herodias talk together of the appearance of the moon:

THE YOUNG SYRIAN: How beautiful is the Princess Salomé to-night!
THE PAGE OF HERODIAS: Look at the moon! How strange the moon seems! She is like a woman rising from a tomb. She is like a dead woman. You would fancy she was looking for dead things.
THE YOUNG SYRIAN: She has a strange look. She is like a little princess who wears a yellow veil, and whose feet are of silver. She is like a princess who has little white doves for feet. You would fancy she was dancing.
THE PAGE OF HERODIAS: She is like a woman who is dead. She moves very slowly.⁵

Ian Fletcher interprets these figures as Narraboth and the page: the page the left hand, masculine figure, Narraboth the more feminine.⁶ Textual evidence supports this view; after Narraboth's suicide, the page speaks of his narcissism and gentleness:

He was my brother, and nearer to me than a brother. I gave him a little box of perfumes, and a ring of agate that he wore always on his hand. In the evening we used to walk by the river, among the almond trees, and he would tell me of the things of his country. He spake ever very low. The sound of his voice was like the sound of the flute, of a flute player. Also he much loved to gaze at himself in the river. I used to reproach him for that.⁷

Yet Narraboth, who, after all, is the Captain of the Guard, and who behaves more boldly than the page in the opening scene, seems to me to be more likely to have been given masculine characteristics than Herodias's page, who is presented in the play as submissive and effete. Ultimately, however, in this context, when the characters are united in a single activity - in this case looking at the moon - this specific question of identity does not hold as much significance as the relationship between the two

⁵ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* (London: Collins, 1948; repr. 1988), p. 552.

⁶ Ian Fletcher, *Aubrey Beardsley* (Boston: Twayne, 1987), p. 77.

⁷ *Complete Works*, p. 560.

figures, which, as the page's speech above suggests, is a quasi-homosexual one, disrupted at this moment by Narraboth's sexual desire for Salomé. Yet it is the reader's conventional task to sort them out; any such ambiguity of identity in a conventional nineteenth-century book or magazine illustration would constitute failure, either on the part of the illustrator who had not sufficiently distinguished his characters, or on the part of the reader, unable to interpret signs which had been placed there to be read. As Snodgrass points out, Beardsley's joke is on 'the bourgeois viewer and his/her absolutist perceptual categories'.⁸ The reader wants to be sure of the identities of these characters, in both dramatic and sexual terms, when in 'The Woman in the Moon' neither of those certainties is available.

The homosexual relationship between the page and Narraboth is, I think, conveyed not only by the textual source but in visual terms by the androgyny exhibited by each figure. The naked figure, although clearly male, has a suggestion of hermaphroditism about his large and prominent nipples. Indeed, the androgyny displayed by both figures is thrown into high relief by the image which faces this one in the book, the title page with its conspicuous leering hermaphrodite, an apparition which must surely influence the reader's interpretation of other illustrations, especially one in such close proximity. In the late nineteenth century the hermaphrodite was commonly understood to be a symbol for homosexuality, both in a literary or metaphoric sense and in contemporary scientific theory. According to late nineteenth-century scientific treatises on sexual pathology, homosexual men and women were prone to display certain physical characteristics of the opposite sex. Krafft-Ebing, in his *Psychopathia Sexualis*, translated into English in 1892, coined the phrase 'psycho-sexual hermaphroditism' (used later by writers such as Havelock Ellis and John Addington Symonds in *Studies in the Psychology of Sex: Sexual Inversion* (1897)) in order to describe the homosexual instinct, and notes that in extreme cases 'the form of the body approaches that which corresponds to the abnormal sexual instinct.'⁹ According to A. J. L. Busst, during the 1890s the androgyne and hermaphrodite were 'symbols of vice, particularly cerebral lechery, demoniality, onanism, homosexuality, sadism and masochism.'¹⁰ Using the universally understood symbolic ramifications of this sexual ambiguity Beardsley is able to introduce a stock range of associations in the reader's response. Without making his meaning explicit, he expresses a narrative: that the two figures are homosexual lovers.

⁸ Snodgrass, *Aubrey Beardsley*, p. 278.

⁹ Dr R. von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis, with especial reference to Contrary Sexual Instinct: a Medico-Legal Study*, trans. by Charles Gilbert Chaddock (Philadelphia and London: F. A. Davis, 1892), p. 223.

¹⁰ A. J. L. Busst, 'The Image of the Androgyne in the Nineteenth Century', in *Romantic Mythologies*, ed. by Ian Fletcher (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967), p. 39.

As with other illustrations in the *Salomé* sequence, a sexual narrative is told by the ways in which the lines intersect. Two of the left-hand figure's fingertips touch the edge of his cloak at his shoulder; they just come into contact with the edge, rather than overlapping, as though he is pushing the cloak off rather than holding on to it, and that he is arrested in the act of undressing completely. The edge of this same hand just cuts across his right nipple, a grazing touch which is erotically charged, especially as the nipple is large and feminised. His right hand reaches behind towards his companion, cutting across the centre of the phallic tassel, in what seems to be a gesture of appropriation. The tip of his index finger just crosses the line of the figure's cloak at the point at which two of the lines depicting the cloak intersect, in what seems to me to be a sexual gesture suggestive of penetration. The right-hand figure's gown leaves one shoulder and part of his chest bare, and by the position of the tassel, and the cord which attaches it to both sides of his gown, it appears that its function is to hold his gown together. The implication is that if his tassel is pulled (the tassel being literal or metaphorical), then his clothes will fall off. These gestures suggest that the two figures are about to have sexual intercourse when they are interrupted by the moon's appearance. Since there is clear textual evidence that this image illustrates a conversation between two male characters, then the androgyny of the right hand figure is unsurprising, since to represent two obviously male characters engaged in such a potentially sexual encounter would, of course, have been too shocking for open publication. Instead, Beardsley has relied upon the coded messages conveyed by the homosexual connotations of the androgyne and by the ambiguity of the phallic/pudendal tassel for his narrative to be decoded by those readers who would recognise the signs. In this representation Beardsley magnifies and comedically distorts an ambiguous instance of quasi-homosexual attachment which exists in a muted form in the text.

Caricature

The most striking aspect of the illustration, and possibly Beardsley's most audacious gesture, is that Wilde's caricatured features appear on the face of the moon. This kind of anthropomorphic representation was, as I described in chapter II, an established tool of caricature, and would have been recognised in this context by a contemporary audience. It also evokes Beerbohm's description in his essay 'Oscar Wilde' of the 'huge oval' of Wilde's face.

The authorial presence, and the caricatural lexicon through which it is expressed, strikes a jarring note and tears the reader's attention away from the anticipation of entering a fictional world, the conceit that is central to the 'organic' decoration of other illustrated books of the period. Yet despite the audacity of

Beardsley's caricature of Wilde's features, the depiction of the author of the book on the frontispiece was not his own innovation but a device ratified by an older convention of book illustration. Portrait frontispieces are very common, particularly in seventeenth and eighteenth-century books. These are either naturalistic or, in Stephen Behrendt's phrase, 'iconographically reinforced to reflect the author's character or works'. Frontispieces 'link the contemporary author with her or his literary heritage, which in the earlier eighteenth century usually means the Classical [...] These illustrations also serve to establish the new author's credentials: visitation by inspiring muse-figures or illustrious predecessors constitutes sanction, and the reader/viewer accepts that sanction, at least tentatively, and reads on, impressed and expectant.'¹¹ The traditional iconography usually includes the author deep in thought, often crowned with a laurel wreath and playing a lyre, the attribute of Apollo, the god who presided over poetry. There is frequently a depiction of the muse, symbolising poetic inspiration, in the background. Often included in the image are characters of the author's invention.¹² These eighteenth-century conventions became popular again, in revivalist books if not in art nouveau books, during the 1890s; for example they were taken up by Lawrence & Bullen's 'Muses' Library' editions of poetry. The frontispiece to the two-volume *Robert Herrick* (1898) depicts a bust of Herrick surmounting a tablet. Pegasus (emblem of poetic inspiration) leaps off a nearby hillside, and flying putti carry wreathes (figure 29).

So in depicting Wilde on the frontispiece of *Salomé* with two of his created characters Beardsley parodies a conventional, iconographically validated form. On seeing this caricature, the reader's understanding of the title of the illustration, 'the Woman in the Moon' takes on a different resonance; without seeing Wilde's features the reader can assume that this is Beardsley's conflation of the popular concept of 'the man in the moon' with the many descriptions in the play of the moon as a woman. However, once Wilde's features are recognised the title takes on a satirical dimension, referring mockingly to his homosexuality. On the left of the moon's surface, as though in Wilde's hair, appears a carnation-like flower, a reference to the green carnation Wilde sometimes wore in his button-hole as a symbol of decadent artifice.¹³ This works as a reference to the bays with which poets were often crowned in frontispieces. The carnation then makes sense as a trophy, a symbol of Wilde's

¹¹ Stephen C. Behrendt, 'The Functions of Illustration - Intentional and Unintentional', in *Imagination on a Long Rein: English Literature Illustrated*, ed. by Joachim Möller (Marburg: Jonas, 1988), pp. 33-35.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 33.

¹³ Wilde instructed his coterie of young male admirers to wear green carnations at the opening of his play *Lady Windermere's Fan* on February 20th 1892. Keen that this affectation should be achieved, told these friends that green carnations were available at Goodyear's in the Royal Arcade - 'They grow them there,' he said. (See Ellmann, p. 345.)

authorial status, in place of the conventional laurel wreath. However, as I have said this is not a portrait but a caricature, and the carnation conveys not classical stature but decadent affectation. The author is represented not as a classical genius but as a homosexual poseur.

Wilde casts a sidelong glance at the naked boy and his androgynous companion, as though eyeing them up as potential sexual partners.¹⁴ Narraboth's eye-like nipple, seen in profile, comedically stares back at Wilde, whilst his other nipple resembles an eye looking directly out at the reader. This comic detail typifies the balance between serious illustration and satire in these images; Narraboth's serious gaze is farcically echoed by his nipples. This combination between gravity and humour frequently occurs in Beardsley's later work. For example, in 'Ave Atque Vale' (1896), the solemn dignity of the youth's gesture is modified by the grotesque silhouette of Beardsley's own startled profile which is created by the formal arrangement of his costume (figure 30).¹⁵

Wilde's stare speaks of covertness, concealment and crookedness; to look out of the corners of one's eyes is always to look surreptitiously, with dishonest or dishonourable intentions. In a play in which looking is invested with such significance and power, and which uses the gaze as a key thematic device, this depiction of Wilde surreptitiously ogling a naked boy is a parodic joke which debunks the literary pretensions of his play.

Moreover, according to Hellenistic physiognomic treatises, which pay great attention to the direction and expression of the eyes, looking around or out of the corners of the eyes was one of the recognisable signs of a passive homosexual.¹⁶ Famous oratorical treatises, such as Quintilian's *De Institutione Oratoria* (*On the Education of the Orator*), minutely codify rhetorical gesture in this way.¹⁷ Wilde and his circle, being classically educated, would have known these treatises and understood Beardsley's reference.

Further dimensions to this parody are given by the numerous commentaries on the appearance and behaviour of the moon which occur throughout the play. Salomé's

¹⁴ Beardsley caricatured Wilde casting a similarly sidelong glance at a caricature of Rothenstein in his drawing 'Lucian's Strange Creatures', intended but not used for *Lucian's True History*, published by Lawrence and Bullen in 1894. (See Reade, *Beardsley*, p. 333, n. 257.)

¹⁵ This visual trick owes a debt to late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century caricature prints, in which profiles were often created by foliage, vases or other elements, and illustrates Beardsley's knowledge of older satirical images.

¹⁶ See Jan Bremmer, 'Walking, Standing and Sitting in Ancient Greek Culture', in *A Cultural History of Gesture from Antiquity to the Present Day*, ed. by Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), p. 23. Bremmer quotes the following sources: Pseudo-Aristotle, *Physiognomica* 808a; Adamantius, in Foerster, *Scriptores physiognomici*, p. 415; Anonymous Latinus 98, in André, *Anonyme Latin*.

¹⁷ Beardsley also draws upon classical rhetorical gestures in order to imply homosexuality in 'The Peacock Skirt' and 'Enter Herodias' (see sections iv and vii).

description of the moon shortly after her entrance at the beginning of the play, ‘The moon is cold and chaste. I am sure she is a virgin, she has a virgin’s beauty. Yes, she is a virgin. She has never defiled herself. She has never abandoned herself to men, like the other goddesses’,¹⁸ takes on a comedic irony when the moon is identified with Wilde, since the joke made by the title of this illustration is that Wilde, as a practising homosexual, had indeed abandoned himself to men. Later, Herod remarks on the ‘strange look’ of the moon: ‘She reels through the clouds like a drunken woman...I am sure she is looking for lovers.’¹⁹ Beardsley’s suggestion is that drunkenness and promiscuity are attributes of Wilde himself. The positioning of this caricature of Wilde at the very beginning of the play makes a pre-emptive strike in the ensuing contest between text and illustration. Most readers will approach the text this way, picking up Beardsley’s innuendoes en route. The portentous and repetitive speeches on the subjects of chastity and promiscuity are put in the context of this caricature, and thus Wilde is hoisted by his own petard.

This is the first caricature of Wilde out of several which appear throughout the illustrative sequence. All the caricatures seem to have one source, as the face in every case is seen from precisely the same angle, as though Beardsley wanted to make absolutely sure that Wilde was recognised every time. In 1889 Wilde had a series of photographs taken in which his new style as smart man about town rather than erstwhile droopy aesthete is apparent. In most of these photographs Wilde looks directly at the camera, an attitude which emphasises the fleshiness of his face (figure 31). According to Reade, Beardsley had one of these photographs displayed prominently over the fireplace in his studio, and was probably looking at this specific image as he drew, rather than caricaturing from a generalised memory.²⁰

Significantly, there is other evidence of Beardsley working from photographs at this time, for instance the self-caricature which he drew over the top of a photograph of himself by Frederick Hollyer, and which he inscribed to Beerbohm.²¹

Visual Puns

Although the principal part of the moon shows it to be full, on the left hand side a pointed section of crescent rises above the cloud: Beardsley clearly wanted to have it both ways. This marked ambiguity in presentation signals another layer of satire in

¹⁸ *Complete Works*, p. 555.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 561.

²⁰ Reade, *Beardsley*, p. 6. Although this detail is not mentioned in his memoirs, Rothenstein describes Beardsley’s working environment in some detail (*Men and Memories*, I, p. 135). Reade does not cite his source, yet it sounds as though it may have been passed on by Rothenstein anecdotally, possibly via his son John Rothenstein, director of the Tate Gallery 1938-1964.

²¹ Reade, *Beardsley*, p. 349, n. 379. Another print of this photograph, not painted over, is inscribed to William Rothenstein.

Wilde's personification as the moon. When the moon appears to be a left hand crescent shape it is waning, whereas when a moon is waxing only the right side is visible.²² Beardsley's caricature of Wilde as a moon on the wane suggests that his status as a cultural figure in the 1890s is fading, a joke which, as I have described, Beerbohm also makes in his literary satires.

As for Beardsley's signature, to which he gives pictorial status in the *Salomé* sequence and which he usually employs as a significant compositional element rather than as a small and incidental initial, it serves in this illustration as a counterpoint to Wilde's caricature. Just as Wilde's presence is indicated by his caricatured features, Beardsley stakes his own claim through his bold signature. As another critic has noted, 'Beardsley's signature in the lower right is here quite prominent, an assertion of primal strength as opposed to Wilde's bloated sensuality.'²³ As though in a boxing ring, the opponents confront one another before the ensuing contest from opposite corners of the space. Moreover, Beardsley's signature is superimposed on the lines which emerge from the right-hand figure's robe as they form a great sweeping cross. This is a visual pun: Beardsley is positioning himself 'on the cross', an expression meaning the opposite of 'on the square': to be on the cross is to be dishonest or surreptitious. Farmer and Henley's slang dictionary of 1890-1904 gives five usages of the phrase, all of which date from between 1861 and 1889, so it was clearly a current term.²⁴ I read this as a statement of Beardsley's intention to oppose Wilde through subterfuge, to use his wit and insider knowledge to launch a satirical offensive from the protective aegis of the respectful form of illustration. Beardsley is proclaiming, from the privileged position of the frontispiece, that his agenda in the following illustrations will be a subversive and satirical one.

²² I am grateful to Dr Thomas Gretton for this observation.

²³ Karl Beckson, 'The Artist as Transcendental Phallus', in *Reconsidering Aubrey Beardsley*, ed. by Robert Langenfeld (London: U.M.I. Research Press, 1989), p. 215.

²⁴ J. S. Farmer and W. E. Henley, *Slang and its Analogues*, 7 vols ([n.p.]: [n. pub.], 1890-1904; repr. New York: Arno, 1970), II, p. 219. E. Cobham Brewer's *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* (London: Cassel, Petter & Galpin, 1894) defines 'on the cross' as 'not "on the square", not straightforward. To get anything "on the cross" is to get it unfairly or surreptitiously.'

Section ii

Title Page (figure 32)

Like a frontispiece, an illustrated title page occupies a special position in any sequence of illustrations, notionally setting a stylistic precedent for the images to follow, and evoking textual themes. Yet like the *Salomé* frontispiece, although in some ways it fulfils these purposes, Beardsley's title page does so in oblique and satirical ways.

Acquaintance with the *Salomé* story would tend to make the reader expect the title page to depict, if not Salomé herself, then at least some appropriately Biblical iconography. However, far from fulfilling this expectation or presenting a neutral or decorative aspect, this title-page image uses a classical theme, and a powerful and challenging one at that: a hermaphroditic terminal god.¹ The sheer inappropriateness of the image signals the potential presence of some parodic motive.

In his lengthy discussion of this image Snodgrass makes many compelling points about the unresolvable ambiguities and inherent contradictions enshrined in it.² His reading greatly advances all previous interpretations of the title page. Yet my argument, although in part in agreement with Snodgrass's, identifies other kinds of meanings simultaneously at work in the image. It seems to me that as well as creating an ambiguous and unsettling image and making the reader's search for stable categories of meaning problematic, Beardsley also sets up references which may be read according to certain conventions of late nineteenth-century satire. The jokes expressed in the image which I shall go on to describe are about the literary poverty of *Salomé* and about its censorship by the Lord Chamberlain, about Wilde's plagiarism and about his sexual practices.

My discussion will begin by considering the expectations conveyed by a title page of this period and type of book, and how this image both fulfils and subverts these. It will then go on to identify the satirical references and other meanings at work in the image.

Strategies of Confrontation

The title page of a book marks a boundary, operating as an official entrance to the matter within. Its principal purpose is of course to convey information about the title, author and publisher. When title pages are illustrated, the iconography often reflects this threshold function. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries it was common for

¹ Although in the censored version of the title page the herm is emasculated, the fact that terminal gods were always male leaves the implication of hermaphroditism intact.

² Snodgrass, *Aubrey Beardsley*, pp. 57-62.

title pages to be decorated lavishly with a device such as an architectural portico, a triumphal arch, or a framing structure supported upon each side by caryatids. These devices fulfil a dual function; on the one hand they create the effect of a cartouche with space in the centre for the text, and on the other the architectural implication invites the reader to metaphorically enter the book as though through a grand doorway.³ The revival of interest in book design in the late nineteenth century instigated a rehabilitation and revision of these conventions.

The structure of Beardsley's title page is on the fringes of art nouveau book design. He uses the offset box derived from the layout of Italian Renaissance books such as the *Historia Romana* of Appian (Venice, 1477) which had become fashionable by this time, and in particular was emulated by Ricketts, the leading exponent of avant-garde book design.⁴ Additionally, the high proportion of image to text here corresponds to the design of art nouveau books and to the decorative gift books popular since the 1880s. Yet the formal austerity conveyed by the strict separation of word and image here - a fine line neatly separates the text box from the unruliness of leaves and flowers - belongs to seventeenth and eighteenth-century conventions, where no matter how swaggering and complicated the surrounding iconography, the text was allocated a discrete area. By contrast, in art nouveau books the formal components of frontispiece and title page were subject to reassessment; the two were frequently conflated, and a radically informal relationship had developed between text and illustration in the work of illustrators such as Ricketts and Housman, demonstrated in Ricketts's and Shannon's *A House of Pomegranates* (1891) (figure 33) and Housman's *Goblin Market* (1893).

So Beardsley's design here has reactionary elements. It goes against the grain of the increased text/image harmony of art nouveau book design, which was made possible by the capacity of photographic line-block technology to reproduce drawn lettering and images together. It also distances itself from the illustrative profusion of the nineteenth-century gift book, which was made possible by the technique of wood-engraving which allowed the printing of type and engraved wood blocks together on the same page (decorative lettering was often designed and engraved for title pages). Beardsley essentially re-formalises the relationship between text and image, not exploiting this capacity of modern line-block reproduction, and even working within

³ John Harthan, *The History of the Illustrated Book* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1981), p. 110. See also Margery Corbett and Ronald Lightbown, *The Comely Frontispiece: the Emblematic Title-Page in England 1550-1660* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979); Theodore Low de Vinne, *The Practice of Typography: A Treatise on Title-Pages with Numerous Illustrations in Facsimile and Some Observations on the Early and Recent Printing of Books* (New York: The Century Co., 1902).

⁴ Stephen Calloway, *Charles Ricketts: Subtle and Fantastic Decorator* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1979), p. 17. See Nelson, *The Early Nineties* for an extensive study of Bodley Head book design.

a pre-wood-engraving tradition, when relief type had to be printed separately from intaglio engraving.

Another factor which sets this title page apart from other art nouveau books of the time is the kind of lettering used. Hand-written lettering was fashionable for Bodley Head books; Ricketts's cover for Wilde's collection of essays *Intentions* (1891) is mostly constituted by drawn lettering, and drawn lettering appears on title pages for other Bodley Head books by illustrators such as Housman, Walter Crane, Selwyn Image, Herbert Home and J. Illingworth Kay.⁵ Yet commercial type is used in Beardsley's text box, even though one of the versions of the cover design has lettering designed by Beardsley which could presumably have been adapted and used for the title page. This separation between image and text on the title page suggests a degree of competition between the two, or at least a repudiation of the text/image harmony which was central to commentaries about book illustration at the time.

Another anomaly is that Beardsley's image mixes decorative and narrative elements - the leafy, flowery background recalls Ricketts's and Shannon's title page to *A House of Pomegranates*, yet a shocking tableau appears in the midst of it, carrying a narrative that calls to be interpreted. The title page for *Salomé* is used as a vehicle for an independent composition. Although it had become usual for the illustration to occupy far more space than the text on a title page, *Salomé* is the only book of this period in which the title page image is not a quiet design, but a strong composition which works independently of its specific use.

If a herm had simply been used as a decorative device, then it might be read as an inappropriate or capricious element for the title page of *Salomé*. As this herm's strong and challenging presence seems to carry more significance than the merely decorative, then it follows that it has a stronger implication. Although Beardsley's 'stage-set' for *Salomé* is expressed through a sequential set of images rather than in the static area of a stage, as I have said the title page holds a privileged position in relation both to the other illustrations and the text to follow. It sets the scene, establishes a visual scheme and dictates our expectations. In appearing on the title page, the herm establishes its status as the tutelary deity of the book, and its classical connotation prepares the reader for the further encoded classical references to follow.

Rejection

Consistent with typical representations of these statues developed in classical antiquity, this herm or terminal god has an armless torso and is set on a tall pillar. Since traditionally herms were placed to mark boundaries, then its place here has an

⁵ See Nelson, *The Early Nineties*, pp. 36-76 (p. 66).

oblique appropriateness, as the title page is the boundary of the text. The reader must pass by the herm before entering the play.

Its identity is ambiguous and perhaps ultimately undecidable, although a late nineteenth-century audience, versed in the identification of classical figures, would have come to conclusions. In antiquity the gods most frequently represented as herms were Pan and Priapus. Both Pan and Priapus were part of the retinue of Dionysus, and both preside over scenes of Dionysiac revelry. However, the herm's female breasts and in the uncensored version its male genitals also suggest an alternative, or tertiary, identity as Hermaphroditus. Nonetheless, two elements, the prominent phallus of the herm in the uncensored version of the image and its garden setting, suggest that Priapus is the herm's primary identity. Priapus was the tutelary deity of gardens and orchards, and the patron of licentiousness. Priapi were often represented in Roman statuary with the head of Pan or of a faun, and as the feral, goat-like features and the curved and pointed horns reveal, this is the case here. Although of course Priapi were phallic, this distinguishing feature would have been considered to be too obscene for depiction on the title page of an openly published work. As it was, the herm's male genitals were censored completely for the published version; my discussion is founded on Beardsley's original version.

Both Priapus and Pan are personifications of licentiousness, and both were rejected for their physical ugliness and deformity. Lemprière's *Classical Dictionary* records how 'the education of Pan was entrusted to a nymph of Arcadia, called Sinoe, but the nurse, according to Homer, terrified at the sight of such a monster, fled away and left him. He was wrapped up in the skins of beasts by his father, and carried to heaven, where Jupiter and the gods long entertained themselves with the oddity of his appearance. Bacchus was greatly pleased with him, and gave him the name of Pan.' Similarly, Priapus was rejected by his mother Aphrodite at his birth because of his genital deformity and was exposed on a mountainside, but he was preserved by the shepherds.

If the herm is intended to personify *Salomé* in some way, as his title page position seems to suggest, then his identity as Pan or Priapus implies, amongst other things, the themes both of licentiousness and rejection. Rejection was topical in Wilde's case because of the censorship of his play from the stage. This is the first reference to rejection of a number which occur throughout the sequence.

Significantly, although the parentage of these gods is contested, Hermes is named as the father each of Pan, Priapus and Hermaphroditus in some Classical sources.⁶ Since Beardsley unequivocally caricatures Wilde as Hermes or Mercury in

⁶ Homer, Lucian and Hyginus all support that Pan was the son of Hermes; Lemprière's *Classical Dictionary* records that Priapus 'was son of Venus by Mercury or Adonis, or, according to the more

‘Enter Herodias’, then I think that this is another reason to suppose that the herm is intended to personify Wilde’s creation.

Homosexuality

As well as these ramifications, Beardsley’s choice of Priapus for the title page to *Salomé* was probably inspired by a book which I believe to have had a crucial influence on his work, the *Priapeia*. This book of epigrammatic Latin poems inspired by - and supposedly once affixed to - statues of Priapus was published by Leonard Smithers in 1890, with verse translations from the Latin by Sir Richard Burton (writing under the pseudonym ‘Outidanos’, or teacher), and with prose translations and scholarly apparatus by Smithers himself (‘Neaniskos’, or youth).⁷ Although there is no specific evidence that Beardsley possessed a copy of this book, given his interest in erotology and in eighteenth-century literature and his habit of frequenting London’s second-hand bookshops, he must surely have been aware of it. Indeed, although the book was to have been sold by subscription, copies remained unsold in Smithers’s Wardour Street bookshop as late as May 1893.⁸ Although Beardsley’s first recorded meeting with Smithers, with whom he was to become close friends, was in 1894, it is unlikely, given his interests, that he had not been into Smithers’s shop long before this.

The etched frontispiece of Smithers’s *Priapeia* depicts a scene of worship of the kind documented to have occurred in antiquity.⁹ A statue of Priapus is surrounded by figures who garland and anoint his phallus, whilst in the foreground an ass, the animal sacred to the god, is sacrificed (figure 34). This image diverges from classical prototypes and from eighteenth-century depictions of Priapus (see figure 35), yet is comparable to Beardsley’s title-page drawing, for which I believe it served as a model.

Priapus’s two main roles, as patron of debauchery and as guardian of gardens and orchards, are conflated in the *Priapeia*. Most of the verses are addressed by Priapus to thieves intent on stealing apples from the orchard he guards, threatening sexual assault as punishment if his warning is not heeded. Priapus has strong homosexual connotations, and these assaults were as likely to be against men as women.¹⁰ All the ninety-five short verses in the *Priapeia* are variations on the theme

received opinion, by Bacchus.’; the parentage of Hermaphroditus is recorded in his name, a conflation of Hermes (Mercury) and Aphrodite (Venus).

⁷ Various editions of *Priapeia* were published in the late eighteenth century, but this collaboration between Smithers and Burton seems to have produced the first English translation.

⁸ Nelson, *Publisher to the Decadents*, p. 17. *Priapeia* was a suppressed book.

⁹ See Lemprière’s *Classical Dictionary*.

¹⁰ A contemporary opinion of the garden god is given Brewer’s *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*: ‘Priapus, in classical mythology, is a hideous, sensual, disgusting deity, the impersonation of the principle of fertility.’

of the sexual penalties of an obscene or facetious nature to which thieves were liable. In a typical verse Priapus declares 'Oft in my speech one letter is lost; for *Predicate* always / *Pedicate* I pronounce. Reason - a trip of the tongue!'¹¹ Here the poet uses the conceit of a lisp in order to pun on the intended word '*prædico*', meaning 'I warn you not to trespass' and '*pædico*', meaning 'I am sodomising you'. These references to debauchery and homosexuality conveyed by Priapus and by the *Priapeia* must surely be a critique on Wilde's life.

Smithers's introductory essay explains the classical mythology surrounding Priapus, and goes on to explore the various rites involved in the worship of this deity, which developed from the more ancient Dionysia, or festivals celebrated in honour of Dionysus. Smithers also supplies prose translations of the verses with elucidatory footnotes, and extensive appendices concerning the nature of various sexual practices in which scholarship and lubriciousness are discernible in equal measure. These appendices are: 'List of terms used in the *Priapeia* as designations of Priapus', 'List of terms used in the *Priapeia* to designate the virile member of Priapus', 'Alphabetical list of additional terms used by Latin authors in designation of the male sexual organ', 'List of terms used in the *Priapeia* to designate the female sexual organ', 'Alphabetical list of additional terms used by Latin authors in designation of the female sexual organ', 'Sodomy with Women', 'Erotic Classical Writers', 'List of agricultural and horticultural terms used tropically in a venereal sense', 'Sodomy', 'Irrumation', 'The Supine Posture in Coition', 'Dancing Girls', 'Masturbation', 'Depilation by Catamites', 'Braccae', 'Bestiality', 'Postures of Coition', 'Infibulation' and 'The Cunnilinges'.

So Beardsley's depiction of Priapus on the title page conjures up by association all manner of sexual practices which by the lights of the day were considered to be degenerate, and associates Wilde with priapic homosexuality.

The composition recalls the rituals, depicted in the frontispiece of Smithers's edition of the *Priapeia*, and described in his introduction, practised at ancient festivals in honour of Priapus. Beneath the herm in Beardsley's title page is a winged figure, hands together in prayer, kneeling at this shrine. However, instead of the supplicatory expression and averted gaze we might expect, his head is turned towards the viewer and his mouth is open in laughter. Similarly, the herm laughs and gazes directly at the viewer. Questions are raised by this: the reader is implicated by their stare beyond the position of being a passive observer, but in what way? Is he or she cast as another worshipper at the shrine of Priapus, in which case it is implied that the reader too is

¹¹ *Priapeia: sive diversorum poetarum in Priapum lusus, or sportive epigrams on Priapus by divers poets in English verse and prose* (Ware: Wordsworth, 1995), p. 36. This edition is a version of Smithers's and Burton's.

lubricious and degenerate? Or is he or she cast as the sacrificial ass, in which case it is implied that the reader is a lamb to the slaughter, the victim of this Dionysiac company and destined to suffer in the course of events, which in this case means the reading of *Salomé*? Moreover, as the *Priapeia* amply demonstrates, to trespass in Priapus's garden, as the reader's entry into the book is figured by the title page, is to risk being sodomised by the god.

The two tall candles which burn on either side of the herm are perhaps symbolic of the winged phalluses or phallic ornaments with which many eighteenth-century erotic images are decorated. In the censored version of the image, they become transferred epithets, symbolically replacing the herm's and the worshipper's missing phalli. Their flames, in this case, are the flames of sexual desire, and the minutely depicted patterns of dripping wax are ejaculatory.

Plagiarism

Amidst the plethora of allusions which it is possible to discern here, I believe that Beardsley's underlying allusion with this depiction of Priapus is to Wilde's reputation for plagiarism.

A crucial point about the *Priapeia*, and one which Smithers makes strongly at the beginning of his introduction, is that the authorship of the book is contested. Virgil and Ovid have been associated with the verses, attributions which both seem remote. Smithers repeats the general opinion which states that the verses were written collectively by a group of friends who gathered at the house of Mæcenas, the patron of Horace, and who wrote the verses in a garden-temple consecrated to Priapus, that these verses were added to by Martial and by Petronius, and that eventually all were collected in one volume by the writer of the opening verses.¹² Together, then, the verses constitute a cento, or patchwork of quotations by various authors put together to form a new work.

As Beardsley was well aware, the criticism of Wilde's first French edition of *Salomé* consistently alleged that it was a plagiaristic patchwork of ideas and quotations from different authors rather than an original work. In an anonymous review in the *Pall Mall Gazette* the reviewer calls *Salomé* 'a mosaic', in other words an assemblage of fragments of pre-existing works. He or she cites Théophile Gautier, Maeterlinck, Anatole France and Marcel Schwob as obvious influences, before accusing Wilde of being absolutely dominated by Flaubert: 'If Flaubert had not written *Salammbô*, if Flaubert had not written *La Tentation de Saint Antoine* - above all, if Flaubert had not written *Hérodias*, *Salomé* might boast an originality to which

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 11.

she cannot now lay claim.’¹³ Indeed, Beardsley’s knowledge of French literature at this time was wide enough for him to have immediately recognised Wilde’s various sources for the play. I think that Beardsley’s use of Priapus on the title page, as though this book were an edition of *Priapeia* rather than *Salomé*, alludes strongly to this criticism of plagiarism and suggests that *Salomé* itself is a cento.

Beardsley’s caricature drawing ‘Oscar Wilde at Work’ (figure 36), made at around this time, also plays on the theme of Wilde’s plagiarism.¹⁴ Wilde is shown sitting smugly at his desk as he works on *Salomé*. He is surrounded by piles of books from which, it is implied, he is freely borrowing: Swinburne, Flaubert’s *Trois Contes* (which includes the influential ‘Hérodiades’), a family Bible, *Dorian Gray*, a work by Gautier, a volume of Josephus and a French history book. The reference books, *French Verbs at a Glance*, a French Dictionary and *Ahn’s First Course* (a school text book which sets out a system for learning basic French, published in 1851), serve to impugn Wilde’s ability with the French language.¹⁵ Beneath the title the drawing is inscribed ‘Il ne faut pas le regarder’, a near quotation from *Salomé* and in this context an allusion to Wilde’s covert literary plagiarism. This is Wilde’s private self, far removed from his public persona as wit and raconteur. Significantly, the same joke about Wilde’s derivativeness is made by Beerbohm in ‘A Peep into the Past’, which I described in chapter II.

Whistler, with whom Wilde had had an uncomfortable friendship since the early 1880s, also frequently accused Wilde of plagiarism, often in letters to newspapers. Much of this correspondence was published by Whistler in *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* (1890). In a typical sally Whistler publicly referred to Wilde in 1890 as ‘that arch-impostor and pest of the period - the all-pervading plagiarist!’¹⁶ In a letter to a friend of April 1893 Beerbohm relates in a postscript: ‘Whistler’s dictum on *Salomé* was “Oscar has scored another brilliant - exposure.”’¹⁷

The butterfly in the bottom right hand corner of the image which seems to recoil in amazement from the scene of Priapic worship before it strongly resembles Whistler’s graphic signature in the curving shape of its wings which end in four distinct points, and in the length of its tail. I think that there are two points being made here. The first is that the Whistlerian signature in the margin of the title page of Wilde’s play suggests the presence of some kind of barbed commentary. In *The*

¹³ 27 February 1893, p. 3.

¹⁴ This drawing was first published as the frontispiece to Mason’s *Bibliography of Oscar Wilde*.

¹⁵ The corrected proof copy of the French edition of *Salomé* at the William Andrews Clark Memorial Library at the University of California in Los Angeles shows numerous corrections of Wilde’s original idioms made by his friends Pierre Louÿs, Marcel Schwob and Stuart Merrill.

¹⁶ Published in *Truth* in 1890 and reprinted in Oscar Wilde and James A. McNeill Whistler, *Wilde v Whistler: Being an Acrimonious Correspondence on Art Between Oscar Wilde and James A. McNeill Whistler* (London: Leonard Smithers, 1906), p. 14.

¹⁷ *Letters to Reggie Turner*, p. 38.

Gentle Art of Making Enemies Whistler's butterfly signature appears on many pages, as a signature underneath letters and often with his waspish marginalia, always flinging its wing tips apart in an attitude of defiant showmanship. Taking *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* as a context, the butterfly's presence here strongly implies witty and acidic criticism, which here is supplied by Beardsley.

As a young man Beardsley refers admiringly in his letters to the tone of Whistler's letters to the newspapers¹⁸, and although, as I go on to discuss in the later section on 'Enter Herodias', his attitude towards Whistler had changed and become bitter, he is still prepared to share and support Whistler's public accusations of plagiarism.

The Grotesque

In accordance with classical representations of the gods Priapus and Pan, the herm has animal horns. The boy worshipper's wings render him bestial. Eros was regularly depicted as an adolescent, so the wings here may suggest this identification. Yet the swanish wings normally given to Eros are here rendered as an insect's, and so bathetically debased from a classical prototype.

As well as these human/beast god/statue ambiguities, the most central ambiguity is the herm's hermaphroditism. There is no gently equivocal androgyny in the Burne-Jones manner, on the contrary the two genders are in competition, the large breasts and male genitals obscene protuberances in relation to each other. As Snodgrass observes, 'The sexuality that appears to be blatant and unequivocal turns out to be highly problematical. [...] The phallic imagery in the picture is not undercut by the female coding; rather, the two genders simply coexist, their implications oscillating without closure, within the same figures.'¹⁹ As I described in the previous section on the frontispiece, this blatant hermaphroditism implies homosexuality, whilst also conveying carnival subversion.

To further problematize the herm's hermaphroditic status, in place of its nipples and navel are eyes. Above all this seems to relate to the insistent theme of looking in Wilde's play, both putting a puerile spin on it and making a clear point about the acquisitively sexual nature of the gaze in the text. It also serves as an echo of the frontispiece opposite, in which the boy's nipples resemble round eyes, one appearing to return Wilde's gaze and one looking out at the reader.²⁰ All these subversive elements constitute a narrative of carnival grotesquerie.

¹⁸ See particularly his letter to his old school friend G. F. Scotson-Clark of July 1891, *The Letters of Aubrey Beardsley*, p.21.

¹⁹ Snodgrass, *Aubrey Beardsley*, p. 61.

²⁰ As Ian Fletcher points out, the conceit of nipples replaced by eyes has two well known sources, Dante Gabriel Rossetti's poem 'The Orchard Pit', and Percy Bysshe Shelley's famous vision of 1816.

Outmodedness

The second point made by the Whistlerian butterfly is that its juxtaposition with the herm and with the kneeling satyr may refer to a specific event. Famously, during the 1880s a number of plays in high Aesthetic mode were performed outdoors in Coombe Wood in Surrey. These were pioneered by Lady Archibald Campbell, friend and patron of Whistler, and the sets and costumes were designed by E. W. Godwin. From his comedic perspective as an ancient historian in his essay '1880', Beerbohm describes this series of plays:

Of the purely æsthetic fads of Society were also the Pastoral Plays at Coombe Wood, and a very charming fad they must have been. There was one specially great occasion when Shakespeare's play, "As you like it," was given. The day was as hot as a June day *can* be, and everyone drove down in open carriages and hansoms, and in the evening returned in the same way. It was the very Derby Day of Æstheticism.²¹

Following the success of *As You Like It* in 1884, the next year John Fletcher's *The Faithfull Shepherdess* was staged. Having undertaken research and made drawings in the British Museum bronze room, for this play Godwin produced an immense statue of Pan, which stood against the trees in the clearing which was used as a stage (figure 37). This herm closely resembles that depicted by Beardsley in the title page. Moreover, a memo written by Lady Campbell at a rehearsal reveals two other crucial props: 'Satyrs not nearly numerous enough,' she writes, 'half a dozen boys ought to be got to play fauns... One hundred butterflies to bring down on the morning of the day...'²²

Both Wilde and Whistler had attended the first night of the play. Perhaps Wilde had talked to Beardsley, Beerbohm or to both about the production of this play as one of the great Aesthetic events of the 1880s. Certainly they both used the information they had gleaned in order to parody him. The title page drawing can be interpreted as a representation of the play in Coombe Wood, as it includes three of the representative components of that performance: a butterfly, a satyr and a herm, all in a garden setting.

Beardsley's allusion to the Aesthetic Movement here, as in both versions of 'The Toilette of Salomé', seems to be a reference to Wilde's failure to transcend his Aesthetic preoccupations with *Salomé*, the same kind of reference to Wilde's outmodedness which Beerbohm makes in 'A Peep into the Past' and '1880'. Wilde's work, we infer, will always slavishly seek to emulate the innovations of Godwin and

Fletcher, p. 75. See Peter Quennell, *Romantic England: Writing and Painting 1717-1851* (London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1970), pp. 139-140.

²¹ Beerbohm, '1880', p. 280.

²² Lionel Lambourne, *The Aesthetic Movement* (London: Phaidon, 1996), p. 169.

Whistler, and is marooned in the Aesthetic considerations belonging to the beginning of the previous decade.

Confrontation

Pagan sexual rites and Christian iconography are blasphemously combined in this image. The herm is, as Karl Beckson states, 'a grotesque parody of the traditional icon of Christ's passion. Instead of a grieving figure at the foot of the cross, a leering winged figure of indeterminate sex is at prayer at the foot of the priapus.'²³ The burning candles also call to mind a religious shrine. This parody of central Christian iconography is continued in other illustrations, particularly in the tailpiece drawing, which takes the form of an Entombment. As in the frontispiece, Beardsley's signature in the title page makes a strong statement. In appearing directly underneath the herm it forms a mirror image of it, in effect an inverted crucifix. If the herm is in some way a metaphor for *Salomé*, or for Wilde, then this inversion, and the threat implied by the central section of the signature which points up towards the base of the herm, can be read as a manifesto of adversity.

This competitive aspect is strengthened by the ambiguous position of the kneeling satyr. He can be interpreted as worshipping the herm, symbolic of Wilde and *Salomé*, but his position also strongly suggests that his object of worship is actually Beardsley's signature. His bent posture and the downward tilt of his head incline his form directly towards this symbol, and both his penis and his hands point towards it.

The laughter of the herm and the worshipper strongly suggests comedy; in fact, the herm's expression closely resembles the traditional comic mask often found in theatres next to a corresponding tragic mask. This universally acknowledged symbol for comedy contradicts the premise of *Salomé*, subtitled in the text box on the title page as 'a tragedy in one act'. The title page image, as well as making various points about rejection and homosexuality, clearly sets forth its refutation agenda: that Beardsley considered the play to be comic, not tragic, and that his illustrations would act accordingly.

²³ Beckson, 'The Artist as Transcendental Phallus', p. 214.

Section iii

The Border for the List of Pictures (figure 38)

Whilst the title page encapsulates a number of jokes and satirical comments on Wilde, the border for Beardsley's own list of illustrations gives a more subtle commentary, one which gives the reader clues about the nature of the illustrations to follow. The following section will treat the themes of Beardsley's critical commentary on the censorship of the title page image, bathos, insurrection, the grotesque, plagiarism and sexual allusion.

Censorship

Beardsley copied the overall composition of the title page for the border, presumably because he saw that if both were published they would balance and echo each other as a pair. The text box is maintained in the same position as before, and Beardsley has replicated the black background against which grow abundant clusters of flowers. Again, an elongated figure occupies the space in the tall wide panel on the left and a winged figure kneels at its feet, in the short panel below the text box.

If the burden of the title page is confrontation, then that of the border for the list of pictures is subtlety. The challenging laughter of the former is transformed here into oblique glances and sly smiles. The Salomé figure, her back to the reader and her face in profile, looks over her shoulder, and the 'little grotesque Eros' wears an eye mask. This is evidently a drama of concealment.

So what is being concealed? Perhaps the very things which were censored from the first image. I interpret Beardsley's replacement image for the original, which had been judged to be unacceptable, as one which comments wittily upon the fact of this censorship. Snodgrass points out the pragmatic basis upon which he interprets Beardsley's artistic decision to have been made; he suggests that 'by substituting for the hermaphrodite god (flanked by two candles) a woman (with one candle), Beardsley seems to have addressed a key problematical element, in effect splitting the hermaphrodite in half.'¹ So far so good: the problem of the decadent and sexual connotations of the hermaphrodite is solved, albeit in a more complicated way than the simple scraping out and inking in that was ultimately employed. However, then Snodgrass goes on to remark that Beardsley undercuts this solution by making Salomé assume a phallic shape - arms hidden and wearing a clinging dress - which Snodgrass assumes would have been 'more immediately threatening' than the title-page hermaphrodite to a contemporary audience, fraught with fears about the

¹ Snodgrass, *Aubrey Beardsley*, p. 63.

changing societal status of women and of their assumption of masculine roles. However, it is not clear to me that the readership of *Salomé* would have been so struck by a phallic shape here and automatically been reminded of the ‘problem’ of the New Woman.

Firstly, although I agree with Snodgrass that the Salomé figure is blatantly sexually provocative, it seems to me that this provocation relates to her femaleness, and not to her assumption of a male role. Her shape is far from phallic, rather it is curvaceous, and the prominence given to her cocked hip, this eminently female curve, is actually emphasised by the two converging diagonal lines on her skirt which begin there and which taper off at her ankles. Her hair does not lend itself to a phallic reading either, in fact its flowery abundance is almost caricaturally female, the pre-Raphaelite model *par excellence*. When Beardsley makes phallic visual puns, he is always much more precise than this, for example in his illustration ‘At a Distance’ (1895) (figure 39)² in which the phallic shapes in the woman’s dress are defined by the pattern unmistakably forming the contours of the glans. In several of the other *Salomé* illustrations, visual puns in which drapery forms phallic shapes (‘The Peacock Skirt’, ‘A Platonic Lament’) are explicitly anatomical.

Secondly, although I think Snodgrass is right to read the border as a sequential image to the title page, and one which contains a commentary on its predecessor, it seems to me that the real joke here is not that the hermaphrodite has been replaced with a phallic shape - it has not - but that for all the reader knows the hermaphrodite may not have been replaced at all. With her back turned to the viewer, we cannot see what Salomé is concealing; we only recognise hermaphrodites when they are naked and when they face forward. The joke is a subtle one; but reading this illustration as a pair to the title page design, the reader can conclude that Salomé may have hermaphroditic features which we are not privileged to see.

Beardsley plays another game with the hermaphroditism which was censored from his first drawing with the figure which kneels at Salomé’s feet. This ‘little grotesque Eros’ is also part satyr, recognisable as such because of the satyr’s conventional attributes of horns and goatlike legs and feet. Satyrs are always male, and yet this figure has female breasts. So without having to draw male sexual organs - as in the first drawing - Beardsley implies that, like the Priapus on the title page, this figure is also hermaphroditic.

Moreover, there are two obvious phallic symbols in this drawing, which perhaps work as substitutes for the penises which were deemed to be unfit for publication on the title page. The large burning candle to the left of Salomé can be

² Reade, *Beardsley*, p. 351, n. 396.

interpreted as a substitute for the title page herm's excised phallus, and the eros's slightly bent pointing forefinger resembles the satyr's slender semi-erect penis.

Bathos

Salomé's teasing backward glance, parted lips and provocatively cocked hip speak plainly of potential sexual revelation. This is the performative body language of a dancer, poised to turn and reveal a greater degree of nudity, keeping the audience's rapt attention with archly seductive eye-contact. Her right arm is drawn in front of her in order to emphasise the coyness with which she looks over her shoulder, and her other arm is clearly in a similar position. Although Zatlin thinks that this may be evidence of masturbation,³ the pose seems to me to resemble more closely that of an erotic music-hall dancer, concealed hands poised to open her dress and to reveal parts of her body or underwear when she turns.⁴ The music hall dancer was an extraordinarily popular subject for artists and poets of the 1890s; for Arthur Symons, John Davidson, Ernest Dowson and Theodore Wratlslaw the music hall provided a great deal of subject matter, and it was a subject Walter Sickert painted obsessively during the period. Letters written by Beerbohm at the time similarly reveal his interest in music hall turns and his frequent attendance at these theatres. On seeing the illustrations in Autumn 1893 when Wilde showed them to Ricketts, an acquaintance of Wilde's, C. J. Holmes, recorded his opinion that Beardsley's Salomé 'is no idolized, wilful princess in a remote Oriental palace, but a jaded Cyprian *apache* from a music-hall performance.'⁵ Whether or not Beardsley specifically had music hall dancers in mind, the body language of Salomé's dance here is vulgar and titillating, and bathetic in relation to the kind of hieratic splendour depicted by Moreau and implied by Wilde's version of the story.

Insurrection

If the title page is, as I have suggested, a commentary upon Wilde's literary status and practices, then the reader can fairly expect the border for Beardsley's own list of pictures to be similarly illuminating about the attitude in which his illustrations were made. Of all the illustrations in *Salomé*, this one is most firmly in Beardsley's own territory. In which case one or both figures in the border design may perhaps be seen to allegorise Beardsley's illustrations. Salomé's posture, which simultaneously expresses something hidden and potential revelation, seems to embody a commentary

³ Zatlin, *Aubrey Beardsley*, p. 114.

⁴ The first recorded full striptease took place in 1893 at the students' Four Arts Ball at the Moulin Rouge in Paris. (Jonathan Sale, 'Past Notes: Anniversary of the week: first professional striptease', *Guardian*, 11 March 2002, p. 20.)

⁵ C. J. Holmes, *Self and Partners (Mostly Self)* (London: Constable, 1936), p. 167.

on the way in which Beardsley's illustrations operate, as does the masked and smiling grotesque Eros; indeed, the mask and the smile are attributes which seem directly to symbolise hidden satire.

As I have said, Beardsley identifies the kneeling figure as 'a little grotesque Eros', and it is also part satyr. Eros (Cupid) and satyrs share an association with mischievousness. Eros is usually depicted, according to Lemprière, 'seem[ing] to meditate some trick', or engaged in some kind of playful behaviour. As in this design he points to Salomé, then the reader infers that this trick will be played upon her, or perhaps by extension upon *Salomé*. Moreover, Eros was well known for his lack of respect in his rebellious games, even towards his own mother Aphrodite (one of whose attributes is a flaming torch, perhaps represented by the candle) who is invoked by the Salomé figure here.⁶ We can perhaps infer from this allusion to mother-son insurrection the possibility of an inversion of the conventional author-illustrator hierarchy to follow in the book. As for Satyrs, they 'chiefly attended upon Bacchus, and rendered themselves known in his orgies by their riot and lasciviousness'. So playfulness, anarchy and lack of respect for authority are all evoked by this compound identity. If we decide to read this figure as an allegorical representation of Beardsley's illustrations, or Beardsley's personal position apropos Wilde's play, then an inference we might make is that the following images will be equivocal, lascivious and disrespectful.

Moreover, this figure, like its kneeling counterpart in the title-page illustration, acts as a link between the reader and the picture through its direct eye contact.⁷ The reader's attention is solicited, and the grotesque Eros becomes the agent through which we approach the work: it secures our attention, and points towards Salomé.

The Grotesque

The Eros's hermaphroditic form is essentially grotesque; this grotesqueness is echoed in its pointed face, frown, distorted ear and the shape of its breasts, which are not rounded and youthful like those of the herm on the title page, but slack and withered. Such displays of aged drooping breasts for comic effect are often found in popular Northern European medieval imagery, for instance in the woodcuts of Hans Weiditz, where they serve as carnivalesque travesties of youthful sexual desirability.⁸ In pointing towards Salomé here, the Eros operates in precisely this way, drawing attention to its travesty of Salomé's legendary youth and sexual appeal.

⁶ *Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology* (London: Paul Hamlyn, 1963), p. 149.

⁷ Milly Heyd, *Aubrey Beardsley: Symbol, Mask and Self-Irony* (New York: Peter Lang, 1986), pp. 196-7; Kooistra, p. 135.

⁸ Hyman and Malbert, p. 17.

Plagiarism

As well as adding to the figure's grotesqueness, these pendant breasts may also allude to an extra-textual source. In Huysmans's description of Moreau's painting 'Salomé' in *A rebours* the 'hermaphrodite or eunuch' which guards Herod's throne is characterised as a 'a terrifying creature, veiled as far as the eyes and with its sexless dugs hanging like gourds under its orange-striped tunic'.⁹ The Eros, with eye-mask and gourd-like breasts, is a version of this guardian figure. It seems to me that Beardsley is illustrating Huysmans rather than referring directly to the Moreau painting here, since the painting does not identify the guard as a hermaphrodite; Huysmans extrapolates luridly on the theme.¹⁰ (Indeed, Beardsley uses the same poetic licence in these illustrations.) As with the many other instances of Beardsley's activity of illustrating the work of other authors throughout the *Salomé* illustrations, the implication here is surely of Wilde's own debt not only to Moreau but to Huysmans' descriptions of Moreau's work.

Sexual Allusions

Pointing is always a sexually loaded gesture in Beardsley's work, both in terms of the configuration of the pointing fingers and the pointer's intention towards that which is indicated. Here the satyr points with its left hand at Salomé as it looks through its mask towards the reader, archly drawing his or her attention towards its activity of pointing. This particular configuration of the fingers, with the forefinger and the little finger extended and the middle two fingers bent back, is one which Beardsley used often. Iconographically it is traditionally used for one of two purposes: it is a protective gesture used to ward off the evil eye, and it is a gesture symbolising the female sex. In this border design it can be interpreted in both ways.

The satyr's evil eye gesture suggests that Salomé is dangerous; of course, she is the most notorious of the *femmes fatales*. Moreover, Wilde's text makes great play of the danger inherent in the act of looking ('do not look at her. I pray you not to look at her'; 'I will not look at thee, thou art accursed, Salomé, thou art accursed'¹¹). So this gesture archly dramatises both Salomé's *femme-fatale* status, and Wilde's treatment of the theme of looking. Archly, both because the reader is directly appealed to and smilingly asked to acquiesce, an unexpected kind of confrontation in

⁹ 'une terrible figure, voilée jusqu'aux joues, et dont la mamelle de châtré pend, de même qu'une gourde, sous sa tunique bariolée d'orange.' Here quoted from J.-K. Huysmans, *Against Nature*, trans. by Robert Baldick (London: Penguin, 1959), p. 64.

¹⁰ Beardsley probably knew Moreau's depictions of Salomé as prints, although he may have seen the paintings during his visits to Paris during May 1892 and/or May 1893.

¹¹ *Complete Works*, p. 555 and p. 560.

this context, and also because the gesture is glib and inadequate as a representational strategy for the danger of this tragedy's legendary protagonist.

The configuration of the fingers here is often used in the kinds of Japanese prints with which Beardsley was familiar at this point by courtesans as a symbol of their sex and therefore of their sexual availability. So the Eros/satyr is indicating Salomé's sex, and bathetically reducing the destructive force of her desire in the play by using a gestural convention by which a courtesan, or wealthy prostitute, signalled her status.

As in 'The Woman in the Moon' there is erotic tension also in the play of nearly contiguous hands and clothes; the proximity of the kneeling figure's pointing forefinger to the hem of Salomé's gown as it emerges, nipple-like, in a little point from a cluster of flowers introduces a tantalising sexual narrative. In a similar vein, this pointing arm grazes the Eros/satyr's own pendant nipples as it reaches across its body, a gesture similarly sexually charged to that made by Narraboth in the frontispiece image.

As I have said, the title page presents a strong challenge to the reader, through the predatory open mouths and stares of the hermaphrodite and the kneeling boy, and through the allusion to Priapus as the marker of boundaries and the guardian of a territory, a figure who has to be braved before the book can be entered. In contrast, the border for the list of pictures is seductive; the reader might be being invited to follow Salomé into her garden. In Beardsley's subtle and complex game of insurrection, his 'own' border design is presented as an alternative to 'Wilde's' title page, and his illustrations are presented as the way to approach the book. Where the figures in the title page show 'front', or an outward bluff designed to conceal dubious activities, here Wilde's plagiarism, the figures in the border design display 'side', Beardsley's swaggering assumption of superiority.¹²

¹² The competition between Wilde's text and Beardsley's designs in *Salomé* was in a sense won by Beardsley when in 1906 Lane published an otherwise unillustrated edition with the border for the list of pictures printed as the cover design.

Section iv

The Peacock Skirt (figure 40)

'The Peacock Skirt' is the first in the sequence of illustrations, after the frontispiece, title page and border for the list of pictures, and it is placed at the very beginning of the play.

Of all the drawings Beardsley produced this is perhaps the most iconic, as it has been used on countless posters advertising productions of *Salomé* since the revival of interest in Beardsley in the 1960s, and endlessly reproduced on teatowels, coffee mugs, mirrors and ashtrays. This commercialisation of the illustration has given it a depthless and dehistoricized career, and has consistently affirmed the overwhelming presence of its decorative qualities at the expense of other possible meanings. Its authenticity as a *Salomé* illustration - which is to say an image which means things in relation to Wilde's text - has been eroded by decontextualised reproductions.

This indifference to its narrative elements has been reflected in the sparsity of the literature on 'The Peacock Skirt'. Reade supplies no narrative in his entry on the drawing, and only one commentator, Snodgrass, discusses it at length.

My discussion in this section will be principally concerned with how decorative and narrative aspects interact and overlap. I shall go on to describe the satirical implications of the image, which I think are conveyed by three main elements: the title, the decorative peacock feather details and the sexual narrative enshrined in the form and arrangement of lines.

Ironically, given the insistence on decoration avowed both by the title of the image - which I will go on to discuss - and by its later commercial usage, the textual passage illustrated by 'The Peacock Skirt' is one of the most powerful of the play, not least because it is a scene of intense discussion, rather than unheeded voices soliloquising, the mode of speech most common in Wilde's play. Salomé, desiring to see Iokanaan and knowing that Narraboth holds the key to his prison, approaches Narraboth predatorily, asks him to bring Iokanaan out, and suggests that his hesitation is due to his fear of the prophet. Narraboth replies that although he is not afraid, Herod has 'formally forbidden' that anyone should open the cistern. Salomé replies with a bribe, promising to let fall for him 'a little green flower' as she passes in her litter the next day. Narraboth replies in anguish: 'Princess, I cannot, I cannot'. Salomé, smiling, as the stage direction dictates, then says 'You will do this thing for me, Narraboth. You know that you will do this thing for me. And to-morrow when I pass in my litter by the bridge of the idol-buyers, I will look at you through my muslin veils, I will look at you, Narraboth, it may be I will smile at you. Look at me,

Narraboth, look at me. Ah! you know that you will do what I ask of you. You know it well... I know that you will do this thing.' At this, Narraboth signals to the third soldier, saying 'Let the prophet come forth... The Princess Salomé desires to see him.'¹

In 'The Peacock Skirt' Beardsley depicts Salomé and Narraboth standing close together, Salomé bending towards Narraboth, her head very close to his, gazing into his eyes with serpentine intensity.² She wears an elaborate head-dress made of peacock feathers and fabric which stands in a stiff wreath. From this head-dress three long whiplash lines sweep down (a forth just emerges in the bottom left hand corner), the eyes of peacock feathers at their tips. Salomé's dress hides her limbs so that her body appears to be, as other commentators have noted, a phallic column.³ The lower part of this white costume is a sweeping black skirt, flamboyantly decorated with peacock imagery. This skirt is cut off by the bottom edge of the drawing, a device which suggests exponential growth, as though it is bursting through the framing lines into textual territory. Salomé occupies a nearly central position within the frame: her head is in the very centre at the top, and although her body curves away towards the left, her peacock skirt sweeps back, compensating, into the right hand space.

Behind Salomé, in the gap she leaves in the upper left hand portion of the image, a stylised peacock stands, wings, tail and tongue extended and surrounded by a cloud of repeating patterns of dots. In decorative terms this serves to fill in an area of otherwise blank space; however, Beardsley seems to have had no compunction about leaving much larger blank areas of unadorned page in other illustrations for *Salomé* ('The Woman in the Moon', 'A Platonic Lament'), and in this context the peacock appears to serve an extra-decorative function, perhaps as Salomé's familiar, or as a force which stands behind her, which gives it demonic implications.

Narraboth stands to her right in subtle contraposto, his body slightly turned away from her, his right shoulder thrust forward defensively, his right knee slightly bent, his left hip curving out, his left arm bent at the elbow and reaching out to the side as though signalling his intention to move into a space away from Salomé. Yet his head is turned back towards her, and his whole attitude expresses reluctant fascination. His eyes meet hers and his brows are drawn into a frown. He wears some sort of turban, and his costume is made up of strips of material draped and wrapped in an elaborate fashion. This costume is consistent with that worn by several of Beardsley's other characters in *Salomé*: the wide black band around his middle is like

¹ *Complete Works*, pp. 556-557.

² Ian Fletcher comments on the vague and incorrect readings of this illustration: 'it is typical of the usual loose manner of reading play and image that "The Peacock Skirt" is assumed to be another version of the encounter between John and Salomé, if indeed it has any precise source in the text at all.' (Fletcher, p. 78.) As I have said, I think that 'The Peacock Skirt' has a precise textual source.

³ Fletcher, p. 79; Snodgrass, *Aubrey Beardsley*, p. 87.

the one worn by the standing girl in the first version of 'The Toilette of Salomé', and his epaulettes are like those worn by the lutenist in 'The Stomach Dance'. This costume ends above his knees, leaving his legs vulnerable and bare. Indeed, his legs below the knee are cut off by the sweep of the skirt, as though engulfed, and one of the flying lines from Salomé's head-dress cuts across his knees, in another gesture of her ensnaring attention.

The above description of this illustration conveys the sense that this is an intensely dramatic scene, form and subject matter combining to illustrate the sort of dramatic textual moment which any conventional illustrator might have chosen. This is indeed the case; most aspects of the image seem bent on the sole aim of dramatising the key conversation between Salomé and Narraboth. Zatlin treats it in this way, as a straightforward drama of female sexual empowerment, in which 'Salomé totally commands her sensuous power when she urges the young Syrian to bring John the Baptist to her', and in which every element tells the story of Salomé's seductive hypnotism and Narraboth's reluctant fascination and captivation.⁴ However, there is a problem with this reading, and this problem is strongly signalled by the illustration's title, 'The Peacock Skirt'.

Titular Disobedience

The title of an illustration, as well as a play, novel or poem, is a privileged linguistic form, since it seeks to represent the material, to label, to explain, and even to manage the reader's expectations and mould their response to the work itself.⁵ Titles are powerful, and the act of naming implies, or confers, authority on the part of the namer. The namer, in the instance of illustration, is the text, and the title is an elected representative sent from this authority to establish an attachment between the two. However, in 'The Peacock Skirt' Beardsley establishes home rule and chooses an independent title, one which has no apparent relation to Wilde's play.

Beardsley's autonomy strongly challenges the vestigial Cratyllic ideal of natural nomenclaturism, founded upon basic principles of linguistic appropriateness and antipathetic to arbitrary or wilful naming, which informed the practice of illustration-naming at the time.⁶ During the nineteenth century, for illustrated books with especially commissioned illustrations, it was deemed to be necessary that the titles of illustrations should fulfil a purely descriptive task: they should either quote

⁴ Zatlin, *Aubrey Beardsley*, p. 119

⁵ These roles of elucidation and illumination are shared by the genre of illustration itself, although the power relations are different.

⁶ See Plato, *Cratylus*, trans. by H. N. Fowler (London: Loeb Classical Library, 1926); Roy Harris, *Language, Saussure and Wittgenstein: How to Play Games With Words* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 7-17; Roy Harris and Talbot J. Taylor, *Landmarks in Linguistic Thought: The Western Tradition from Socrates to Saussure* (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 1-19.

directly from the text or paraphrase. Titles of illustrations tend to be the site of repetitive descriptive nomenclature, like chapter titles. These titles served a purely denotative function, making each image identifiable and linking it to its textual source. Usually illustrations appeared next to the text they illustrated, and the titles would be listed either with the image or at the front of the book, sometimes both. Ross, in his 'Note of Exclamation' to *Forty-Three Drawings by Alastair* (1914) parodies the crudely prosaic nature of these captions by emphasising their self-evidence: "“She got up and glared at him” and “It was James after all” are typical titles of pictures from a serial novel of thirty years ago.”⁷ However, it had become common practice in the late 1880s and early 1890s for illustrators to dispense with the titles which had previously been a constitutive part of illustration; greater emphasis upon book design, decorative illustration and overall cohesion between text and image began to make titles redundant, and, as we infer from Ross, unfashionable.

As I suggested in the previous sections on 'The Woman in the Moon' and the title page, the conventions which Beardsley chose to follow in his *Salomé* illustrations reveal a reactionary tendency, albeit one which coexists with startling modernity and satire. Contemporaries such as Ricketts and Housman had largely dispensed with titles, yet Beardsley upholds the tradition. The title 'The Peacock Skirt' refers to what appears to be a decorative property of the illustration, when the reader would expect it to refer to the narrative element, something which goes unmentioned. If Beardsley had been playing straight, and using the old fashioned convention of explanatory titles, this drawing would be called something like 'Salomé persuades Narraboth', or, more dramatically, quoting from one of Salomé's lines, 'Look at me, Narraboth, look at me'. As a denotative title, 'The Peacock Skirt' functions to direct the reader's attention and tells him or her what to look at in the image. In this instance, the title plays ironically with this denotative function, since a glance at the image is sufficient for a reader to see that as well as a decorated skirt the image also depicts Salomé talking to Narraboth. The title suggests illustrative self-absorption. Since Wilde's *Salomé* has nothing to do with a 'peacock skirt', this self-admiration constitutes a significant act of disobedience in the hierarchical positioning of text and illustration within the illustrated book. It announces that the crucial element of the illustration is the skirt, Beardsley's own addition to the illustration, and in doing so implies that its narrative element is secondary, not as intrinsically interesting. Since in the broader context of this book, the illustrations form the decoration, the text the narrative, then this in turn implies that the play is not as interesting or as absorbing as this decorative element. Thus, authorial status is debunked, and the reader's attention is directed away from the text and even from an affirming, seconding visual rendering of the

⁷ *Forty-Three Drawings by Alastair* (London: John Lane, 1914), p. xxii.

text, and directed towards the qualities peculiar to the image. Beardsley's title rests uneasily at the interface between illustration and text, refusing to contribute in prosaically conventional terms, reticent about its degree of commitment to Wilde's text altogether, discreet about its other projects. Whatever the range of meanings, which I will come to, Beardsley's intransigently independent titular stance is a bold strategy of defiance directed both towards the author and more broadly towards the conservative commercial and societal system which fostered the author/illustrator hierarchy.

Anachronism and Incongruity

In addition to its broad gesture of insubordination, the title's irony also functions as a signal that the illustration is not as straightforward as it might at first appear, and hints at satiric content.

Using one of the common devices of satire, the design is anachronistic and incongruous: as the title suggests, Salomé is adorned with peacock patterns, which were the staple elements of 1870s and 1880s Japonisme, not of ancient Judæa, the setting of Wilde's play. The peacock feather was the pre-eminent emblem of the Aesthetic Movement. Leighton's *Pavonia* of 1859 and G. F. Watts' *A Study with the Peacock's Feathers* of 1862-5 are two early examples, and Rossetti and Burne-Jones both frequently used the peacock emblem. Throughout the 1880s many ceramic peacocks were produced, and William De Morgan used the theme in numerous tile and vase designs. The peacock motif was also used in wallpapers: in 1873 E. W. Godwin designed a paper which depicted peacock's heads in roundels, printed in dark blue on a bright blue background; Liberty's printed fabric 'Peacock Feathers', designed in 1884, was one of the most popular designs of the late nineteenth century; Walter Crane designed the wallpaper 'Peacock Garden' in 1889. Beardsley's foregrounding of the peacock theme in this illustration is surely intended as a joke about Wilde's own part in the Aesthetic Movement, the implication being that his work is outmoded and that his taste is passé, since by the early 1890s Aesthetic design was unfashionable. It is therefore consistent with the reference to the Coombe Wood plays made by the title page design and with the jokes made by the furniture and décor depicted in both versions of 'The Toilette of Salomé', which precisely represent Aesthetic taste.

The title's insistence on the illustration's decorative nature also draws the reader's attention to the Japonisme of its styling. The image is based on Japanese wood-cuts in which the folds of costume give structural and compositional ballast to

an image, and in which the ‘action’ itself might be spatially peripheral.⁸ This stylistic and structural source is anachronistic and incongruous in the context of Wilde’s *Salomé*.

Beardsley’s title pointedly draws attention to Salomé’s costume, as though this is a fashion-page image, a point made more strongly in the following illustration ‘The Black Cape’. Such description of specific clothing for parodic purpose was also used by Laforgue in his parodic reworking of the Salomé story in *Moralités légendaires*. Each time Laforgue’s heroine is glimpsed, her costume is described. He describes ‘a young lady melodiously cobwebbed in jonquil chiffon with black polka dots’, ‘a young form hermetically cobwebbed in jonquil chiffon with black polka dots’, and ‘a disappearing form completely cobwebbed in jonquil chiffon covered with black polka dots’.⁹ Her outfit is anachronistic and incongruous, and its description is pointedly repetitive. The object of Laforgue’s parody is largely Flaubert; his detailed and repetitive descriptions of Salomé’s costumes in ‘Hérodiades’ are parodied by the fashionable modernity of his Salomé’s costume. It seems to me that Beardsley is using this same device here; the foregrounding of the pattern on Salomé’s dress debunks the hieratic seriousness of Wilde’s drama.

Whistlerian Gesture of Defiance

As well as these satirical asides I think that the prominence given to the theme of the peacock both in the image and in the title implies one principal parodic reference. ‘The Peacock Skirt’ is surely intended to evoke ‘The Peacock Room’, Whistler’s great *coup de théâtre* of 1876, his decorations in the Prince’s Gate house of the shipping magnate Frederick Leyland. The dining room of Leyland’s house was initially intended to be a showcase for his collection of blue and white china, and for the painting he had commissioned from Whistler, ‘Rose and Silver: The Princess from the Land of Porcelain’ (1864). The walls of the room were covered with Spanish leather, and when Whistler complained that the red decorative motifs painted on the leather killed the tones of his painting, Leyland gave him permission to paint these flowers yellow and gold instead. Not satisfied with this, Whistler asked to decorate the wainscoting and cornice with a wave pattern. Leyland was called away on business and while he was away Whistler’s design, as he put it, ‘just grew as [he]

⁸ Zatlin suggests that ‘The Peacock Skirt’ may be modelled on Ichiryusai Hiroshige’s *sumi-e* designs from the ‘Drawing Book of the Floating World (Ukiyo Gafu)’, vol. 3. See Linda Gertner Zatlin, *Beardsley, Japonisme and the Perversion of the Victorian Ideal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 199.

⁹ ‘une jeune fille mélodieusement emmousselinée d’arachnéenne jonquille à pois noirs’; ‘une jeune forme hermétiquement emmousselinée d’arachnéenne jonquille à pois noirs’; ‘une jeune forme décidément emmousselinée d’arachnéenne jonquille à pois noirs’. Here quoted from Jules Laforgue, *Moral Tales*, 6th edn, trans. by William Jay Smith (London: Pan Books, 1985), pp. 92, 93, 98.

‘painted’; from its beginnings as decorative trimming it became a radical scheme for the entire room. The ceiling was covered with imitation gold leaf over which Whistler painted a peacock-feather pattern, and the shutters were painted with four gold peacocks. Leyland, on his return, was furious, and at first refused to pay Whistler for his work. In the end a compromise was reached, although when the payment was made it was in pounds, as though to a tradesman, rather than guineas. In response to this insult (although probably a carefully pre-meditated rejoinder to Leyland’s predictable anger), Whistler added the final touch to the room: a large mural of two fighting peacocks, one representing the patron, guarding a pile of coins beneath its claws, the other, which screeches in defiance, clearly representing the artist.¹⁰

The decoration of the peacock skirt in this illustration is strongly reminiscent of that of the painting of two fighting peacocks in Whistler’s Peacock Room (figure 41).¹¹ Beardsley’s use of the stylised crescent shapes and long curved feathers, as well as the overall shape of the decoration, the way in which it curves to the right, and has narrow feather strings tipped with plumage flying out from it, makes a clear reference to the tail of the peacock on the left in Whistler’s painting. The peacock in the top left hand corner of the image, although reversed here, has precisely the same raised-wing stance as the right hand peacock in Whistler’s mural. The crescent-shaped patterns of dots which surround the peacock are also a direct visual quotation from the cloud pattern on the left-hand side of the fighting peacocks mural. That these references to Whistler are deliberate and intended to be recognised as such is made clear by the butterfly ornament in the form of a Whistlerian signature which appears in Salomé’s hair, underneath the wreath, its forked tail falling onto her shoulder. Its appearance in this illustration tells the same story as the Whistlerian butterflies which appear elsewhere in the sequence: as I discussed in my commentary to the title page, a reference to Whistler implies an accusation of plagiarism. In this illustration Beardsley develops the conceit further by adapting a specific design of Whistler’s, rather than by, as elsewhere, only using symbols which simply represent Whistler. This motif is surely used as a signal of Beardsley’s rebellious agenda in his illustrative task, of taking up a Whistlerian position both in terms of exceeding the patron’s wishes, and in terms of the extravagantly combative invective (often directed at Wilde) which Whistler used in *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*. Beardsley casts

¹⁰ David Park Curry, *James McNeill Whistler at the Freer Gallery of Art* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1984), pp. 53-60; Richard Dornant and Margaret F. Macdonald, *James McNeill Whistler* (London: Tate Gallery Publications, 1994), pp. 164-167; Lambourne, *The Aesthetic Movement*, pp. 50-61; Linda Merrill, *The Peacock Room: A Cultural Biography* (Washington DC: Yale University Press, 1998).

¹¹ Beardsley visited the Whistler Room at Prince’s Gate in July 1891 (*The Letters of Aubrey Beardsley*, pp. 19-20).

himself as Whistler to Wilde's Leyland; the maverick genius in relation to the staid patron.

Obscenity

As I described in chapter II, another established satirical tool is obscenity, and 'The Peacock Skirt' tells an obscene sexual narrative.¹² Salomé's body is phallic: the peacock skirt itself forms the scrotum, her hidden arms form her body into the shaft, and since her neck is hidden behind her shoulder, her head, appearing to join at this point, represents the glans. Her head-dress makes a slight indentation in her hair, representing the tip of the glans.

Salomé arches her phallic body threateningly towards the uncertain, hesitant, unhappy figure of Narraboth, as he half turns away, yet turns his head back towards Salomé, sexually in thrall, hypnotised. Yet the subtle erotics of this encounter are overlaid with several satirical events. Two gestures made by Narraboth undercut his ostensibly ambiguous demeanour with an explicit sexual invitation. His right arm is inclined at the wrist as though his hand is resting on his hip; yet his hand rests a little lower than this, and the folds of his costume make a gap at this point into which his first finger is placed, allowing him to point covertly towards his penis. His other hand is thrown backwards, as if signifying his desire to evade this interview, gesturing towards freedom. Yet directly above his hand appears Beardsley's signature, which can be read as a schematic depiction of male genitalia: Narraboth gestures towards a phallic symbol. Thus the narrative is thrown into instability; is Narraboth a reluctant interlocutor, wishing to escape Salomé's attention, or is his posture simply a lewd sexual invitation? We know from Wilde's text that Narraboth desires Salomé sexually, yet that he is reluctant to grant her request to bring Iokanaan forth from the cistern. Beardsley seems to picture this conflict with the ambiguity of Narraboth's posture. Yet his hand gestures indicate a more pressing sexual narrative of a less exalted nature.

Narraboth's knock-kneed stance also conveys a narrative, as knock-kneed, or baker-kneed, was from the seventeenth century onwards a slang adjective applied to an effeminate or homosexual man.¹³ This slang term perhaps has roots in antiquity, as according to Quintilian's instructions to orators on pose and bearing, to be knock-kneed implied being a passive homosexual in Roman times.¹⁴

¹² The only sustained commentary on the sexual narrative of this illustration is given by Snodgrass, in *Aubrey Beardsley*, pp. 86-92. Snodgrass's commentary differs from mine in that his concentrates on the sexual ambiguities expressed in this encounter, and how they relate to semantic ambiguity. The comments I make on satire, obscenity and Narraboth's costume are original.

¹³ Jonathon Green, *Slang Through the Ages* (Chicago: NTC, 1997), p. 227.

¹⁴ Bremmer, p. 24.

Sexual vulgarity is also expressed by Narraboth's costume; like Salomé's costume here, and like folds of fabric in the first version of 'The Toilette of Salomé' and 'A Platonic Lament', this tells its own independent sexual narrative. Narraboth wears more than his heart on his sleeve. Part of the turned-up section of the sleeve nearest to his wrist and closest to Salomé juts out in the form of a breast. Just to the right of and above this breast form are folds which resolve themselves into a vulval form, inner and outer labia and clitoris. Moreover, the shape of the entire sleeve seems to represent a penis penetrating a vagina: the bulging epaulettes represent the scrotum, the sleeve the shaft of the penis and the large folds of the turn-up the vaginal opening. All these obscene elements serve to undermine the high seriousness of Wilde's play.

Whilst the ostensible narrative of 'The Peacock Skirt' is faithful to Wilde's text, the decorative elements, which should properly be quiet and respectful, are the site of an unruly and distracting subversive commentary, effectively staging a carnivalesque parody of their task.

Section v

The Black Cape (figure 42)

I take Beardsley's casual remark that this drawing is 'simply beautiful and quite irrelevant' at face value in terms of contemporary notions of what constituted illustrative relevance: this illustration is unique in the sequence in that neither the image nor the title bear any relevance to *Salomé*.¹ Yet on the other hand I think that 'The Black Cape' is relevant to Beardsley's own satiric agenda. Consequently, my discussion will examine the ramifications which costume, the burden of the image, might have when employed as a satiric device.

I see no reason to assume that the female figure has necessarily to be identified as Salomé, so in the following section I will refer to her simply as the model.

Bathos

'For all costumes are caricatures. The basis of Art is not the Fancy Ball', wrote Wilde in his essay 'The Relation of Dress to Art'.² Beardsley, as self-elected costume designer for *Salomé*, makes Wilde's initial maxim literally true in a number of his illustrations. Salomé's and Narraboth's dress in 'The Peacock Skirt' bristle with satiric implications, and 'Enter Herodias', the second version of 'The Toilette of Salomé', 'A Platonic Lament' and 'The Dancer's Reward' all express a parodic commentary through costume. 'The Black Cape' seems to me to be the apex of this tendency, as its central project is to use an exaggerated depiction of contemporary fashion as a way of provoking Wilde and of opposing his strong views on stage costume and dress reform.

In the early 1890s fashionable women's dress underwent a great transformation, and the silhouette was radically altered. Although extremely tight corseting at the waist was still practised, the bustle went out of fashion, as did the horizontal swags of the tie-back at the front of the skirt. James Laver describes the new style thus: 'dresses were smooth over the hips and made to fit more snugly by being cut on the cross. Skirts were long and bell-shaped and usually had a train...'³ Laver goes on to describe the aphrodisiac consequences the results of this extra length are supposed to have had on spectators: 'Since it was impossible to cross the street

¹ *The Letters of Aubrey Beardsley*, p. 58.

² Oscar Wilde, 'The Relation of Dress to Art: A note in Black and White on Mr Whistler's Lecture', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 28 February 1885, p. 4, here quoted from *Aristotle at Afternoon Tea: the Rare Oscar Wilde*, ed. by John Wyse Jackson (London: Fourth Estate, 1991), p. 52.

³ James Laver, *A Concise History of Costume* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969), p. 206. Laver is, of course, referring to fashionable dress as presented in fashion plates of the era, not to the more functional dress worn by most women most of the time.

without holding up the long skirt with one hand, the gesture inevitably displayed the lace frilling of the petticoat, which seems to have had at this period an extraordinary amount of erotic appeal.’⁴ However, without doubt the most striking change wrought to the silhouette in the 1890s was the magnitude of sleeves, ‘which at the beginning of the decade were peaked at the shoulders but otherwise fairly narrow, had grown to enormous proportions by 1893. Some sleeves were so large that cushions were necessary to keep them in place.’⁵ (Figure 43) Hats were ‘whimsical in character and perched precariously on top of the head’, and in construction they were ‘tiny confections of straw, chiffon, ribbon, and flowers’.⁶ In addition, large fans were carried.

‘The Black Cape’ demonstrates all these striking characteristics of fashionable contemporary dress. The model wears the long narrow skirt fashionable in the early 1890s, widening at the bottom, and revealing a petticoat. Her waist is tightly corseted, her fashionable layered cloak gives her a large-sleeved silhouette, she carries a fan and wears a disproportionately small straw hat. These details exaggerate only in a small degree from the extraordinarily mannered original of the fashionable female silhouette. This image is drawn in the style of contemporary fashion plates, which by the 1890s were far more numerous than before and were usually reproduced in black and white. Beardsley was knowledgeable about fashion, and throughout his oeuvre are numerous examples of his adaptations of contemporary women’s dress.⁷ The slender ‘S’ bend figure, which Beardsley depicts here, had recently been made fashionable by illustrators such as Georges Pilotell, who was credited with the invention of the ‘seven foot beauty with the ten inch waist’, and Charles Dana Gibson.⁸ The model’s outfit in ‘The Black Cape’ would have been understood by Beardsley’s contemporaries as being, above all, bang up-to-date.

The very modernity of the costume must, if we are to apply a satirical model of interpretation to this illustration, be a significant factor in the joke. A deliberate anachronism such as this intrudes bathetically upon the hieratic and antique atmosphere which Wilde had been at pains to construct in *Salomé*, undermining it with commonplace associations. A significant influence for Beardsley in his use of bathos was Ada Leverson, a mutual friend of Wilde’s and Beardsley’s, who wrote a number of parodies of Wilde’s works, and in July 1893, just as Beardsley was about

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 206-208.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 208.

⁶ Doris Langley Moore, *Fashion through Fashion Plates 1771-1970* (London: Ward Lock, 1971), p. 124.

⁷ See R. A. Walker, ‘Aubrey Beardsley as a Designer of Costumes’, *Artwork*, 7 (1939), 253-257; Heyd, pp. 119-123.

⁸ Madeleine Ginsburg, *An Introduction to Fashion Illustration* (London: V&A and Pitman; Warminster: Compton, 1980), p. 11.

to start work on the *Salomé* commission, had published in *Punch* a parody of *Salomé* entitled “An Afternoon Tea Party”.⁹ Levenson sets the drama in a modern hotel restaurant, reducing Wilde’s grand evocation of a palace to a site of conventional bourgeois respectability. She uses dress as a bathetic device, having her Princess Salomé arguing with another character over the ownership of a shawl: ‘I don’t want your shawl. Your shawl is hideous. It is covered with dust. It is a tartan shawl. It is like the shawl worn in melodrama by the injured heroine who is about to throw herself over the bridge by moonlight. It is the shawl of a betrayed heroine in melodrama. There never was anything so hideous as your shawl.’¹⁰ This is a direct parody of one of Salomé’s speeches to Iokanaan in Wilde’s play, ‘Thy body is hideous. It is like the body of a leper. It is like plastered wall where vipers have crawled; like a plastered wall where the scorpions have made their nest. It is like a whitened sepulchre full of loathsome things. It is horrible, thy body is horrible.’¹¹ Levenson’s introduction into the *Salomé* story of a ‘tartan shawl’, a specifically late nineteenth-century item of women’s dress, is directly comparable to Beardsley’s introduction of contemporary fashionable costume. Both comedically clothe Wilde’s play in bourgeois ordinariness.

Dress Reform

In addition to the bathetic thrust of the joke, the modern costume seems to me to be intended as a specific challenge to Wilde’s own opinions on dress. In one of the lectures Wilde gave during his American tour of 1882, announced as a talk on ‘the Practical Application of the Principles of the Æsthetic Theory to Exterior and Interior House Decoration, With Observations upon Dress and Personal Ornaments’, he articulated his dislike of the forms of modern dress:

At present we have lost all nobility of dress and, in doing so, have almost annihilated the modern sculptor. And in looking around at the figures which adorn our parks, one could almost wish that we had completely killed the noble art. To see the frock-coat of the drawing-room done in bronze, or the double waistcoat perpetuated in marble, adds a new horror to death.¹²

Wilde became closely associated with the dress reform movement in England, which sought to substitute clothes which allowed freedom of movement, such as divided skirts for women, in place of those which were restrictive and debilitating. Wilde

⁹ Levenson went on to publish parodies in *Punch* of Wilde’s poem *The Sphinx* as ‘The Minx - A Poem in Prose’ on 21 July 1894 (p. 33), and *The Importance of Being Earnest: A Trivial Comedy for Serious People* as ‘The Advisability of Not Being Brought Up in a Handbag: A Trivial Tragedy for Wonderful People’ on 2 March 1895 (p. 107).

¹⁰ Ada Levenson, ‘An Afternoon Tea Party’, *Punch*, 15 July 1893, p. 13.

¹¹ *Complete Works*, p. 559.

¹² Here quoted from Oscar Wilde, *Essays and Lectures* (London: Methuen, 1908), pp. 162-163.

argued strongly against what he considered to be the irrationalities of dress perpetrated in the name of fashion:

Indeed all the most ungainly and uncomfortable articles of dress that fashion has ever in her folly prescribed, not the tight corset merely, but the farthingale, the vertugadin, the hoop, the crinoline, and that modern monstrosity the so-called 'dress-improver' also, all of them have owed their origin to the same error, the error of not seeing that it is from the shoulders, and from the shoulders only, that all garments should be hung.¹³

As a champion of what was known as 'rational dress' (a style which was closely associated with the Aesthetic Movement), he prescribed flowing lines and an uncorseted silhouette, the ultimate ideal of which was ancient Greek costume, and which took details and styling from medieval and Renaissance sources. The extreme artifice of fashionable dress of the 1880s and the 1890s, stiffly corseted and highly ornamented, was anathema to Wilde's dictates, and he described it 'as ugly as it is useless and as meaningless as it is monstrous.'¹⁴ Beardsley's caricatural depiction of a fashionable costume of the 1890s in 'The Black Cape' appears to be a way of baiting Wilde for his public position as a dress reformer, a satirical stance which Beardsley shared with many caricaturists of the time.

As I have said, Beerbohm was another of the caricaturists to use the theme of Wilde's ideas on dress reform, and his essay 'The Incomparable Beauty of Modern Dress', which appeared in the undergraduate journal *The Spirit Lamp* in June 1893, was a direct challenge to Wilde's contempt for contemporary costume:

Nothing, in point of fact, could be more foolish than the complaints made against modern dress on the ground that it is monotonous, common or unlovely. Of the dress of no period whatsoever can we say that it is lacking in loveliness and we should not forget that, whilst Beauty is for ever being prattled of by those who have the slightest knowledge of it; ugliness is a word which is seldom heard except from the lips of those to whom the sense of Beauty has been denied. To the Aesthetic temperament nothing seems ugly. There are degrees of beauty - that is all.

And I do not know of any period when costume reached so supreme a point of excellence as in London at this moment.¹⁵

Beerbohm goes on to cite Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, ironically praising it for the way in which modern dress is used in the story to dramatic effect:

¹³ Oscar Wilde, 'Woman's Dress', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 14 October 1884, here quoted from *Aristotle at Afternoon Tea*, p. 55. The vertugadin and the farthingale are both kinds of hooped petticoat, the dress-improver is a bustle.

¹⁴ Oscar Wilde, 'The Relation of Dress to Art', p. 51.

¹⁵ Beerbohm, 'The Incomparable Beauty of Modern Dress', p. 93.

The writer of that splendid, sinister work *Dorian Gray* has given an entirely modern setting to his characters. In every scene of the story we find him dwelling upon and drawing rich dramatic effect from such things as the wing of an Inverness cape or a pair of straw-coloured gloves or, even, a pair of patent-leather boots. Foppishness is woven, with exquisite effect, through the very fabric of the work.¹⁶

This is, of course, a barbed joke; through taking Wilde's descriptions of costume out of their larger context, Beerbohm disingenuously praises him as a champion of modern dress.

Beardsley's use of modern dress in 'The Black Cape' also, I think, alludes to a public argument between Wilde and Whistler on the subject of modern dress in art, in which Wilde denigrated its representation whilst Whistler defended it. In his *Ten O'Clock* lecture, Whistler explicitly positions his own views in opposition to Wilde's, speaking of how Rembrandt, 'when he saw picturesque grandeur and noble dignity in the Jews' quarter of Amsterdam, [...] lamented not that its inhabitants were not Greeks. As did Tintoret and Paul Veronese, among the Venetians, while not halting to change the brocaded silks for the classic draperies of Athens. As did, at the Court of Philip, Velasquez, whose Infantas, clad in inaesthetic hoops, are, as works of Art, of the same quality as the Elgin marbles.' His next line reveals that he had Wilde the dress reformer personally in his sights: 'No reformers were these great men - no improvers of the ways of others!'¹⁷ In his review of Whistler's *Ten O'Clock* Wilde responds to this particular sally, writing of how Whistler aimed one of his 'arrows, barbed and brilliant [...] (*O mea culpa!*) at dress reformers most of all. "Did not Velasquez paint crinolines? What more do you want?"'¹⁸ As I discuss at various points, Beardsley frequently baits Wilde throughout these illustrations with subtle references to Whistler and to the public arguments between the two men. Here, by practical application, Beardsley positions himself on Whistler's side in the argument on the suitability of modern dress as a subject matter for visual art. Indeed, the ornament in the model's hair, like that which appears in Salomé's hair in 'The Peacock Skirt', resembles Whistler's butterfly signature, signalling Beardsley's allegiance to the artist in his contest with Wilde.

As this fashion plate take-off occurs as an illustration to a play, then the joke necessarily relates to theatrical costume. In his book on stage costume Laver observes that the 'balloon sleeves' of early 1890s female dress 'were even thought essential in stage costume and fancy dress - a requirement which, on the stage, made any attempt

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

¹⁷ James McNeill Whistler, *Mr. Whistler's 'Ten O'Clock'* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1888), p. 8.

¹⁸ Oscar Wilde, 'Mr Whistler's Ten O'Clock', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 21 February 1885, pp. 1-2, here quoted from *Wilde v Whistler*, p. 7.

at historical accuracy in period plays an impossibility.’¹⁹ Wilde’s essay ‘The Truth of Masks’ is a sustained criticism of this kind of anachronistic theatrical costume. He writes disparagingly of how ‘our inartistic grandfathers sat peaceably in a stifling atmosphere of anachronisms, and beheld with the calm complacency of the age of prose an Iachimo in powder and patches, a Lear in lace ruffles, and a Lady Macbeth in a large crinoline’.²⁰ It is surely in part his knowledge of this essay which suggested to Beardsley the idea of provoking Wilde by including an image of modern fashionable dress within the illustrations to his play.

Sexual Narrative

Eroticism (although generally undercut by satire) is a recurrent theme throughout the sequence of illustrations, and ‘The Black Cape’ is no exception. The quasi-erotic - or clandestinely erotic - spectacle of the fashion plate, in which sexual characteristics are exaggerated by costume and presented for admiration whilst the genre protests its innocence, is transformed here into a kind of peep show by overtly provocative elements. In the narrow space between the great sleeves of the cape we see that the model’s torso is naked; the mannered pose, designed to display to the female browser the shape, hang and detailing of dress, becomes an unchaste invitation to voyeuristic interest.²¹ This surprising opening in her cape exposes the model’s navel, and although her breasts are hidden the inference we draw is that we are witnessing an erotic dance, a theme which as we have seen Beardsley also uses in the border design. In this case the static fashion plate pose is transformed into a momentary stillness, an instant captured from the sway of the dancer’s movement. And of course, the most legendary of all strip dances, Salomé’s dance of the seven veils, is already enshrined within Wilde’s text. With ‘The Black Cape’ Beardsley presents another version of ‘The Stomach Dance’, although this time the dancer is not wearing an Ancient Greek dancing girl’s costume (see section ix) but an eroticised version of contemporary dress. Given the costume’s obvious modernity, there is no ‘respectable’ interpretation of what she wears. The segments of her cape can, in this light, be seen as six stiff veils which will be removed in turn, each revealing further nudity.

¹⁹ Laver, *A Concise History of Costume*, p. 208.

²⁰ Oscar Wilde, ‘The Truth of Masks’, in *Intentions* (London: Osgood McIlvaine, 1891), pp. 237-38. This essay was originally published as ‘Shakespeare and Stage Costume’, *The Nineteenth Century*, 17 (1885), 800-818. ‘The Truth of Masks’ is a revised version, and I have chosen to quote this as the one which Beardsley is most likely to have known. As I discussed in chapter II, at around this time Beardsley’s close friend and collaborator Beerbohm drew caricatures of Wilde in stylistic emulation of Beardsley in the margins of his own first edition of *Intentions*.

²¹ The depiction of a smart outer garment and nudity beneath suggests Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec’s images of semi-clad women in brothels, posters which Beardsley probably saw during his trips to Paris in Spring 1892 and 1893.

The degree of petticoat exposed is vastly exaggerated from the amount which, as we have seen, would normally be displayed by women as they lifted their skirts just far enough not to trail in the muddy street, and here is reminiscent of a music-hall dancer's of the period. Petticoat dancers, like can-can dancers in Paris, were popular entertainment, the poor relations of artistic 'skirt dancers' like Loïe Fuller.²² Their high kicks would gradually reveal more layers of petticoat and glimpses of underclothes, a dance which presumably played on the fetishistic appeal of glimpses of petticoat in normal life.

So the model's display of her petticoat is an erotic event. There is also another layer of significance at work, in this case a visual pun, since a 'petticoat' was at the time a slang term for a woman, a term most usually applied to prostitutes.²³ Again, Beardsley undercuts the image with sordid connotations.

Similarly, the gesture the model makes with her left hand seems to be erotically suggestive. The closeness of the middle two fingers, whilst the little finger and the forefinger are stretched out to the sides, suggests a vulval form, especially as Beardsley has taken pains to keep them a fraction apart.²⁴ This gesture symbolically prefigures the eroticised nudity which we might expect at the culmination of her strip-tease dance.

In presenting a version of a fashion-plate pose, the illustration parodies the act of looking, an act which is of course invited by the fashion-plate genre. Through its eroticism it transforms looking into an act of voyeurism. In so far as the illustration can be read as a parodic response to the text as well as a satirical riposte to Wilde personally, it can be seen to relate to the repetition of the theme of looking which is so central to the structure of *Salomé*, and expressed repeatedly in lines such as 'you are always looking at her. You look at her too much. It is dangerous to look at people in such fashion. Something terrible may happen.'²⁵ The literary portentousness of these repeated phrases is mocked both by the commonplace of a fashion-plate image and by its overtones of music-hall eroticism.

The positioning of Beardsley's signature is important in all the *Salomé* illustrations. Here it appears in the bottom right hand corner and corroborates the erotic promise of the model's pose; the central line points directly up beneath the lowest frills of her petticoat, as if priapically reaching towards it or desirous of looking up inside it.

²² John Stokes, *In the Nineties* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 82.

²³ Farmer and Henley, V, p. 178-79.

²⁴ This is perhaps a parodic response to the Baroque convention of representations of the Virgin Mary, in which her middle two fingers are usually crossed, a gesture signalling her sexual purity.

²⁵ *Complete Works*, p. 553.

Incongruity

'The Black Cape' is, stylistically, perhaps the most 'Japanese' of the illustrations for *Salomé*. The stiff, angular forms of the black cape are reminiscent of Japanese wood-block prints of figures in which the fabric of kimonos and of Samurai warrior costumes stand away from the figure itself, so that the overall shape is determined by costume, in direct contrast to the concern of Western art with drapery which follows the forms of the body.

In her book on Beardsley and Japonisme, Zatlin identifies two techniques which Beardsley has borrowed from Japanese printmaking, *ishizuri* and *shironuki*. According to Zatlin, *ishizuri* denotes a white image against a black background, and *shironuki* is a refinement on this, a linear white design against the black background.²⁶ As she observes, the model's white torso, since it is entirely defined by its surrounding black forms, is drawn according to the rules of *ishizuri*, whilst the white lines which demarcate the cape and which decorate the black planes with flowers and linear patterns are *shironuki* lines.²⁷

Beardsley's studied emulation of Japanese printmaking techniques in this illustration is, of course, strikingly irrelevant to the subject matter and style of Wilde's play, and thus, as I described in my previous chapter on satire, constitutes a formal satirical device.

The jokes in 'The Black Cape' operate on a number of levels, and play upon the usual kinds of extra-textual target: Wilde's public position as a dress reformer, his opinions on the proper subject matter of art and of theatrical costume and his arguments with Whistler. Like other illustrations in the sequence, most notably the title-page design, this image also parodies the textual theme of looking, presenting it not as a solemn and powerful dramatic gesture but as a voyeuristic activity.

Ultimately this illustration is a gesture of sabotage, in that it takes as its subject something which Wilde had publicly pronounced to be ugly and monstrous and presents it within his own book, adorned with various scurrilous references to sexual display. The reader is no longer able to maintain the illusion that the illustration provides a commentary on the story (whatever other tricks it may be up to), as 'The Black Cape' is so clearly in frank competition for his or her attention: don't read that, look at this.

²⁶ Zatlin, *Beardsley, Japonisme*, pp. 103-105.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

Section vi

A Platonic Lament (figure 44)

'A Platonic Lament' depicts the Young Syrian Captain of the Guard Narraboth, Herodias's page and the moon, which again has Wilde's features superimposed on its face: the same group which also appear in 'The Woman in the Moon'. The two images are closely related, forming a sub-sequence within the whole, a miniature comic strip (or tragi-comic strip). My discussion will assume this illustration's status as a sequel, or comic-strip pairing, to the frontispiece image. I will treat it primarily as an image which contains its own parody, in which solemnity and travesty coexist.

'A Platonic Lament' illustrates a minor occurrence in the play, the two short speeches made by Herodias's page immediately after the death of Narraboth, who, finding his love for Salomé unrequited, kills himself. Herodias's page, who was himself in love with Narraboth, says:

The Young Syrian has slain himself! The young captain has slain himself! He has slain himself who was my friend! I gave him a little box of perfumes and ear-rings wrought in silver, and now he has killed himself! Ah, did he not foretell that some misfortune would happen? I, too, foretold it, and it has happened. Well, I knew that the moon was seeking a dead thing, but I knew not that it was he whom she sought. Ah! Why did I not hide him from the moon? If I had hidden him in a cavern she would not have seen him. ¹

There follows an exchange between Salomé and Iokanaan, then the page says:

He was my brother, and nearer to me than a brother. I gave him a little box of perfumes, and a ring of agate that he wore always on his hand. In the evening we used to walk by the river, among the almond trees, and he would tell me of the things of his country. He spake ever very low. The sound of his voice was like the sound of the flute, of a flute player. Also he much loved to gaze at himself in the river. I used to reproach him for that.²

His lament is unheeded; indeed, this second speech occurs between a remark by the First Soldier about the necessity of removing the body and an equally expedient reply to him by the Second Soldier. Typically of *Salomé*, pragmatic and poetic discourse exist cheek by jowl, but are discrete entities.

The illustration depicts Herodias's page mourning over his friend's corpse. Narraboth's body spans the width of the frame about three quarters of the way down. He lies on a platform, and is covered by black drapery. His face is shown in profile at the far right, and as in the frontispiece his hair rises from his forehead steeply,

¹ *Complete Works*, p. 560.

² *Ibid.*

extending in this image into a fine point. In the far right-hand corner either hair or drapery hangs down below the platform in thick black clumps, beneath Narraboth's head.

The page bends over Narraboth's body, taking his friend's head in both hands in an attitude of grief, although this may, of course, also be interpreted as a lover's gesture. His thick, heavy hair and his features are very similar to those depicted in the right-hand figure of 'The Woman in the Moon', which corroborates my reading of that figure as the page rather than as Salomé or as another female figure. Whilst he wore a gown in 'The Woman in the Moon', here he is naked. His gender was ambiguous in the frontispiece image; here, the draped body of Narraboth lies in front of the page's body between his waist and his thighs, hiding his genitals, yet his knobbly knees, the shape of his back, the musculature of his wiry arms and his small nipple all signify masculinity.

Sexual Jokes and Visual Puns

Yet the sobriety of this funereal scene and these properly respectful elements are undercut by another, parodic narrative; this threnody is spiked with sexual *double-entendres*. The forms which hang down beneath Narraboth's head make the silhouettes of breasts in profile. Moreover, under the black robe Narraboth's left knee is slightly bent, so that the shape of this knee - knobbly, as it is in 'The Woman in the Moon' and 'The Peacock Skirt' - stands out in profile. This is odd, since we expect a corpse to lie flat; additionally, the muscular tension suggested by this slightly lifted knee is disturbingly suggestive of the gestural language of sexual arousal. The shape of the raised thigh and the knee together form the silhouette of a phallus. As I suggested in chapter II, these sexual components are comedic - facetious gestures of irreverence - rather than erotic.

This use of drapery in the *Salomé* sequence to form breasts, vulvas and penises could perhaps be Beardsley's joke at the expense of formal art school training, for which 'drapery' was a formal category of study.³ Beardsley had a specific score to settle on this point. Early in 1892 his friend Aymer Vallance had engineered a meeting between Beardsley and William Morris. Morris was in search of an artist to illustrate the Kelmscott Press books upon which he was working at the time, and Vallance felt that Beardsley's work might interest Morris. So far only Burne-Jones had come up to Morris's fastidious standards, and Burne-Jones had not the time to devote to the production of so many drawings of sufficient precision for

³ At art schools like the Slade School of Fine Art and the Royal Academy, until well into the twentieth century students were expected to make studies of fabric hanging in folds. Like drawing from the life model this was in preparation for large figurative compositions.

the wood-cutting process. However, the meeting in Hammersmith was not a success. Beardsley made a drawing to illustrate *Sidonia the Sorceress*, an edition of which Morris planned to publish, but when he showed it to Morris he was unimpressed, complaining that the central figure was 'not pretty enough', and he added disparagingly 'I see you have a feeling for draperies.'⁴ Beardsley was 'bitterly disappointed', and left the house 'with a fixed determination never to go there again'.⁵ I read Beardsley's recurrent play on the bawdy potential of drapery folds as partly a flippant gesture of insolence directed towards Morris as a result of this disparaging treatment. *Salomé* was, after all, Beardsley's first high-profile illustrative commission, and it clearly presented the opportunity for this kind of score-settling. This combative attitude continued; in a letter to Smithers of December 1897 about a journal called the *Peacock*, which they planned to edit together, Beardsley makes his antipathy to Morris explicit: 'On the art side I suggest that it should attack *untiringly and unflinchingly* the Burne-Jones and Morrisian medieval business, and set up a wholesome seventeenth and eighteenth-century standard of what picture making should be.'⁶

In contrast with his funereal drapery Narraboth's feet are clad in elaborate slippers decorated with carnations, and with turned-up toes ending in pom-poms. These slippers boldly and directly challenge the atmosphere of sober lament through their carnival frivolity. I believe that there may be a coded reference here in addition to this, as a nineteenth-century slang expression for dying was 'to turn up one's toes'; in the light of this, the exaggerated shape of the corpse's toes operates as a visual pun.⁷

Caricature

About three quarters of the way up the frame on the far right hand side Wilde's features appear beneath a cloud similar to those which appear in 'The Woman in the Moon'. It is implied that, as in the frontispiece, his face is superimposed on the moon's face, although this time the outline of the moon is not delineated; there is an eye, a nostril and lips, and dots around the eye and mouth to describe lines and wrinkles, and the only delineating line is a short sloping one just to the left of the eye, where the hairline was in the previous image. Just as Wilde is introduced as a voyeur in the covert homosexual drama between the two young male protagonists of 'The Woman in the Moon', here again he participates vicariously in a potentially

⁴ C. Lewis Hind, from the introduction to *The Uncollected Work*, p. xiv; Miriam J. Benkovitz, *Aubrey Beardsley: An Account of his Life* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1981), p. 46.

⁵ MacFall, p. 23.

⁶ *The Letters of Aubrey Beardsley*, p. 413.

⁷ Farmer and Henley, VII, p. 145; Green, p. 344.

homosexual narrative. Whilst in the frontispiece Beardsley ingeniously parodies a canonical form in which the author was traditionally represented, in this image the author's appearance amounts to an outright caricature, an established tool of satire and completely unacceptable in the genre of illustration.

Only half Wilde's face is visible, the other half being cut off by the frame. The precision of this cutting in half, coupled with the lack of clear reason for this form of representation, leads me to suspect that this is a visual pun on the slang phrase used in the late nineteenth century 'half-cut', meaning to be drunk.⁸ In a similar vein Beardsley caricatured Wilde shortly after the *Salomé* commission as Bacchus in the frontispiece to John Davidson's *Plays*, published by Lane and Matthews in 1894.⁹ Wilde's frequent drunkenness at this period is often referred to in memoirs and biographies by friends and acquaintances, and seems to have been peculiarly repellent to Beerbohm. In a letter to Reggie Turner of April 1893 he writes 'I am sorry to say that Oscar drinks far more than he ought: indeed, the first time I saw him, after all that long period of distant adoration and reverence, he was in a hopeless state of intoxication. He has deteriorated very much in appearance: his cheeks being quite a dark purple and fat to a fault.'¹⁰ Beerbohm makes the point again in another letter to Turner of August 1893, when he says 'Nor have I ever seen Oscar so fatuous: he called Mrs Beere "Juno-like" and Kemble "Olympian quite" and waved his cigarette round and round his head [...] I felt quite repelled.'¹¹

Incongruity and Undercutting

In the bottom left hand corner stands a dwarf caryatid or pall-bearer, supporting the platform on which Narraboth's body lies with his right hand. Commentators have always had difficulties in 'seeing' this figure's posture, since the broken areas of black and white and the curious shapes of the clothes have the effect of distorting the figure and hindering a coherent reading, so I will briefly describe it.¹² The dwarf's great mass of hair forms two sections which end in points like a jester's cap, one which projects directly behind his head, with the curved point close underneath Narraboth's platform, the other which falls over his hunchback and ends in a curl behind his waist just above Beardsley's picture frame. Only his right arm is visible, which he holds out in front of him, bent at the elbow so that his hand, which is obscured by the drapery which covers Narraboth, holds the platform above his head.

⁸ Farmer and Henley, III, p. 250; Green, p. 175.

⁹ See Reade, *Beardsley*, p. 340, n. 317.

¹⁰ *Letters to Reggie Turner*, p. 35.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

¹² Snodgrass refers to his 'ultimately indecipherable form' (*Aubrey Beardsley*, p. 282), and Zatin misleadingly states that the dwarf's right hand is 'hidden in the act of masturbation' (*Aubrey Beardsley*, p. 188), when in fact it is simply not depicted.

The white short sleeves and white gauntlets of this arm are cut into curving, flame-like points at their hems, like the clothes of Narraboth in 'The Peacock Skirt' and those of the musician in 'The Stomach Dance', and he wears a segmented bracelet, the uniform which Beardsley gives Herod's court, and which Narraboth wears on his ankle here. Underneath the short sleeve and the glove, visible between his upper and lower arms, he wears a black sleeve which falls into a long rounded point at his elbow. He is cut off at the waist by the framing lines of the image. His torso is similarly bitonal, as at the bottom his garment is white, yet half way up it changes, with the same jagged, flame-like pattern, to black. The lines of his waist both at his front and at his back curve outwards, as if to suggest a barrel chest and a hunch back. In the centre of his forehead is a large wart which resembles an eye or a nipple, a dual symbolism which recurs throughout the illustrations, and which is most strikingly rendered in the title page design.

Dwarf figures are often represented in Renaissance and Baroque art, and the most famous depictions occur in the work of Callot, who produced a series of etchings in 1616 devoted to hunchbacked dwarfs. Each *Gobbi* etching depicts a dwarf in a grotesque posture playing a musical instrument.¹³ It has been suggested that the grossly exaggerated features of these figures, the beak-like noses and huge eyes, are actually theatrical masks.¹⁴ These are essentially comedic figures, Rabelaisian entertainers.

The dwarf had a complex range of signification; he was granted extraordinary freedom of speech, a franchise won on the grounds of his uncanny difference from other men. His deformity and coarse, exaggerated features made him an object of fear when scripture dictated that men were made in the image of God, and physiognomy dictated that distorted features were an outer manifestation of inner evil; yet his small stature tempered this fear and lessened this perceived threat. He was permitted to be both sage and fool, the court jester and the court philosopher, whose jokes were subversive, often the vehicles of trenchant comment and criticism. One of the consequences of the dwarf's ambiguous status and the equivocal attitude surrounding him was the unique interchangeability between king and jester, the jester being the king's ironic counterpart. The dwarf was the embodiment of otherness, ambiguity and subversion, the Saturnalia or carnival personified, and was accommodated by being simultaneously revered and made ridiculous.¹⁵

In 'A Platonic Lament', as well as representing ambiguity and subversion, he seems to be a malignant presence. He turns and looks directly out of the frame,

¹³ See Gerald Kahan, *Jacques Callot: Artist of the Theatre* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1976), pp. 91-93.

¹⁴ Daniel Ternois, *L'art de Jacques Callot* (Paris: F. de Nobèle, 1962), p. 133.

¹⁵ See E. Tietze-Conrat, *Dwarfs and Jesters in Art* (London: Phaidon, 1957), p. 9.

arching his eyebrows and slyly smiling despite his solemn duty as a pall-bearer, looking knowingly out at the reader and away from the ostensibly focal point of Narraboth's corpse. The tilt and angle of the dwarf's head are the same as those of the page, and his expression parodically mimics the page's.¹⁶ His features are similar, yet coarser: as in a caricature, his nose and chin are more pointed, his mouth is wider and his hair is even more voluminous than the page's. His raised eyebrow and sidelong glance suggest that he has momentarily lapsed from the downcast expression which he had adopted in parodic emulation of the page.

If we make our context the representations of Ancient Greek and Roman theatre which Beardsley knew well from vase paintings in the British Museum, we find that this character has a specific identity. He can be identified as Dossenus, a frequently represented stock figure in Roman *Fabulae Atellanæ*, or rustic farces. Terracotta masks and Roman vase paintings show that Dossenus conformed to a recognisable grotesque form: he had a hump-back, a jutting chin, a hooked nose, a crooked face, a broad mouth with puckered corners, unsymmetrical eyebrows and, most tellingly of all, a large wart in the centre of his forehead.¹⁷ He was a mischievous character; he was the precursor of the Renaissance dwarf persona, and he survives even today in the figure of Mr Punch. Dossenus's presence in 'A Platonic Lament' seems to me to be intended as a comment upon the nature of Wilde's play. Since Dossenus was invariably confined to the rustic farce, and excluded from high theatre, then Beardsley's implication is that this play, *Salomé*, is a vulgar pantomime, and not, as Wilde claimed, a powerful tragedy wrought with poetic genius.

In this corner, behind Dossenus, as though taking part in the funereal procession, is Beardsley's signature. As in the related image, 'The Woman in the Moon', Beardsley positions himself, or his symbol, in opposition to Wilde. Wilde and Beardsley have changed corners, as though the boxing match implied by the frontispiece had been taking place, and Beardsley is positioning himself in readiness for the next round. Here Beardsley is also a collaborator with the dwarf, who in Bakhtin's phrase is the 'parodying and travesty double, [the] comic-ironic *contre-partie*', both to the grieving page and to the illustration itself.¹⁸ The illustration does not echo the text but burlesques it, and subjects it to carnivalesque treatment.

By naming and illustrating what in fact is a minor event in the drama Beardsley amplifies it to the point of distorting its importance within the context of Wilde's play. The title is not taken from Wilde's text but is of Beardsley's own devising. It

¹⁶ This observation is made by Snodgrass, *Aubrey Beardsley*, p. 282.

¹⁷ Margarete Bieber, *The History of the Greek and Roman Theatre* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 416; Laver, *Costume in the Theatre*, p. 31.

¹⁸ Bakhtin, p. 53.

carries more information than the reader would normally expect, since once he or she has grasped the narrative of the illustration, his or her reaction is to wonder why it is not called simply 'The Page's Lament'. Instead the word 'platonic' is imported, a slippery and ambiguous word, since uniquely it can refer equally to a purely spiritual, non-physical love, and to an active homosexual relationship; whilst unmistakably making a reference to sexual activity, it is ready innocently to disclaim this.

Moreover, Platonic love always occurs between an older man and a youth. Wilde and Douglas, of course, fit these criteria. Beardsley's choice of this scene, and his suggestive title, are another elaborate reference to Wilde's homosexuality.

Section vii

'Enter Herodias' (Figure 45)

'Enter Herodias' is one of the most complex of the sequence of illustrations, and one of the most overtly satirical. I will be concerned here mostly with the caricatures which appear in this image, and with the complex commentaries which they supply on the themes of homosexuality and plagiarism, and with the satirical implications of the grotesque attendant.

'Enter Herodias' simultaneously depicts fiction and non-fiction, a stage performance in which we are privileged in seeing both the author and his fictional characters. Wilde himself is depicted standing in the bottom right hand corner, in front of a stage upon which a performance of *Salomé* is taking place. Looking directly at his audience (or at the reader), he makes a sweeping gesture with his right arm towards the stage behind him. His other arm seems to rest on the bottom edge of Beardsley's frame. With his left hand he holds a closed copy of *Salomé*. He wears a hat in the form of an owl and carries a staff. Behind him Herodias makes her entrance, flanked by a page boy and a grotesque attendant.¹

The title, 'Enter Herodias', refers not to an episode from the play but to a shortened form of Wilde's stage direction; the full direction, which occurs just under half way through the play, reads 'Enter Herod, Herodias and all the court.'² Taking a characteristic liberty, Beardsley has modified the direction to suit his own composition. This title draws attention to the mechanics of a production of the play, which is surely another teasing reference to Beardsley's project of, as Beerbohm put it, 'dramatising *Salomé*'. The use of this stage direction title, which combines the actual with the fictional, also presented the opportunity for a caricature of Wilde not as a supernumerary character in the play, as elsewhere, but as the author, a real figure in the world. As such it provided Beardsley with the occasion to furnish him with a set of symbolic props.

Caricature of Wilde

Not long before Beardsley began working on the *Salomé* illustrations, Wilde's caricaturists had been presented with a new set of props with which to work, which replaced the Aesthetic paraphernalia which had been such prominent features of

¹ The general composition may be derived from the numerous paintings Walter Sickert made of music hall scenes, which frequently reveal the conductor or master of ceremonies off stage presiding over events. Beardsley and Sickert became friends at around the time of the *Salomé* commission. (Sturgis, *Aubrey Beardsley*, p. 149.) Beardsley's debt to Sickert at this time is also acknowledged by Rothenstein in *Men and Memories*, I, p. 184.

² *Complete Works*, p. 561.

1880s caricatures. This related to the occasion of Wilde's notorious curtain speech at the opening of *Lady Windermere's Fan* on 20 February 1892, in which the props he carried on stage - a cigarette and a green carnation - seem to have been even more provoking to his audience than his speech, in the course of which he thanked them for their intelligent appreciation of his play.³ Whilst immense wit and charm tempered Wilde's speech, the cigarette constituted a real breach of manners. Beerbohm drew a caricature of Wilde at the front of his own copy of *Lady Windermere's Fan*, inscribed 'at the first night - 1892' (figure 46), in which the cigarette and the carnation are prominent.⁴ One of the published caricatures of Wilde which appeared following this performance was Bernard Partridge's 'Fancy Portrait' which was published in *Punch* on March 5th 1892 (figure 47). Wilde's authorial arrogance is expressed in this image by the appendage of the names Shakspeare [*sic.*] and Sheridan to his own. Making a similar point, the bust of Shakespeare has been toppled from its plinth, and leans neglected on the floor, whilst Wilde assumes the classic authorial pose, leaning casually, head supported against one hand, against the pillar. He smokes a cigarette, the smoke rings of which are labelled 'PUFF! PUFF! PUFF!', a pun on the extravagantly laudatory claims Wilde had made in his speech.⁵ On the plinth, against which Wilde leans, are three French plays: *Françillon* (1887) by Alexandre Dumas, Emile de Girardin's *Le Suplice* [*sic.*] *d'une Femme* (1865) and Victorien Sardou's popular farce *Odette* (1881). Next to the bust of Shakespeare on the floor is an open volume of Sheridan's comedies, and a large open box of cigarettes. If the displaced bust hints that Wilde is attempting to assume a Shakespearean rôle, then the open copy of Sheridan's comedies, alongside the French plays on the plinth, surely suggest literary borrowing: we infer that Wilde has plundered another Irish playwright's work, inserted some morally suspect ideas culled from French drama, and served it up as his own. Indeed, A. B. Walkley in his review of *Lady Windermere's Fan* writes that 'for the staleness of the incidents one has only to refer to half a dozen familiar French plays', and goes on to cite Dumas's *Françillon* as one of the major sources.⁶

It seems to me that Beardsley's depiction of Wilde in 'Enter Herodias' is in this precise mould of caricature. As with Partridge's cartoon, the props Beardsley uses all encapsulate narratives which require to be read. These narratives relate to things known or suspected about Wilde's character and literary practices. At first glance both of these caricatures could pass as respectful - Wilde in authorial pose,

³ See Ellmann, p. 346.

⁴ Lawrence Danson, *Max Beerbohm and the Act of Writing* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 73.

⁵ To 'puff' means both to exhale smoke and 'to advertise (goods) with exaggerated or false praise' (COD).

⁶ A. B. Walkley, review of *Lady Windermere's Fan*, *Speaker*, 27 February 1892, pp. 257-8.

Wilde as the great orator - it is only through reading the details that another kind of narrative emerges.

The most prominent feature in the caricature of Wilde in 'Enter Herodias', the staff or caduceus which he holds, has never adequately been accounted for in critical commentaries on this illustration. Reade comments: 'in the corner, wearing the owl-cap of a mage and holding his prompt copy of the play, together with the caduceus of a physician, Oscar Wilde introduces the scene with the gesture of a showman; although his caduceus is also a crutch, because he leans on a gospel of "curing the senses by means of the soul, and the soul by means of the senses."' ⁷ Fletcher, closely following Reade, tells us that it is 'the caduceus of the physician, which alludes to the master's aphorism: "to cure the senses by means of the soul and the soul by means of the senses."' ⁸ Snodgrass opens the interpretation up, but does not carry it to a conclusion, when he states that Wilde 'carries the caduceus of the ancient herald, and later the physician. So it is little wonder he can confidently give us the showman's gesture of entry into the drawing's secrets [...] the healing physician's caduceus is also drawn as a crutch, implicitly impugning the author who "leans on a gospel of 'curing the senses by means of the soul, and the soul by means of the senses.'" ⁹ Kooistra's comment, after quoting the usual aphorism, is that 'it is an ironic allusion - a parodic repetition with critical distance. Like the magician's headgear [...] the caduceus is a double-edged symbol when read in terms of the whole design, for if we agree with Kenneth Clark that the plate focuses on "the presence of evil", the image suggests that the cure is worse than the disease.' ¹⁰ Zatlin asserts that 'he is the showman/shaman, who stands in front of the stage and welcomes the audience. His owl mask, caduceus, and the antique phallic prickets are emblems of wisdom belonging to a magician - Beardsley's graphic tribute to the play's wordsmith.' ¹¹

It is clear from this how one critic's remark can be repeated so often that it assumes a specious veracity. In fact, Reade mistook the type of caduceus; the rod which Wilde holds is actually that of Mercury rather than Æsculapius, the physician to the Argonauts, as there are invariably two snakes entwined around Mercury's caduceus in the forms of two pairs of semi circles, which is the case here, whereas there is only ever one curled around that of Æsculapius. Thus, the medical interpretation is invalidated and along with it the direct relevance of the Wildean dictum. The second clue that an allusion to Mercury is being made is the large cloak over one shoulder, a traditional attribute of the god, and worn here by Wilde.

⁷ Reade, *Beardsley*, p. 337, n. 285.

⁸ Fletcher, p. 84.

⁹ Snodgrass, 'Oscillating Spaces', pp. 45-46. The same point is made in the later work *Aubrey Beardsley*, p. 228.

¹⁰ Kooistra, p. 139.

¹¹ Zatlin, 'Wilde, Beardsley and the Making of *Salomé*', p. 353.

So Beardsley unequivocally presents Wilde as Mercury, the messenger god, and the god of orators, merchants and thieves. According to the standard reference work of the day, Lemprière's *Classical Dictionary*, 'Mercury was the messenger of the gods, and of Jupiter in particular; he was the patron of travellers and of shepherds; he conducted the souls of the dead into the infernal regions, and not only presided over orators, merchants, declaimers, but he was also the god of thieves, pickpockets, and all dishonest persons.' Beardsley plays a particularly clever and complex game with this allusion, and one typical of his ambiguous satire of Wilde throughout the *Salomé* illustrations, as there are a number of ways in which the caduceus can be interpreted. Whilst it would have been possible for Beardsley, if pressed, to claim that Wilde's Mercurial props alluded to his famous eloquence, I think that theft and trade are his principal references, and that this is an elaborate joke at the expense both of Wilde's literary plagiarism, and of his patronage of rent boys.

Mercury's thievery was of the most audacious order; he robbed Neptune of his trident, Venus of her girdle, Mars of his sword, Jupiter of his sceptre, and Vulcan of his mechanical instruments. Wilde's identification with Mercury here is another joke about shameless literary borrowing.

An anecdote related by Rothenstein in his memoir *Men and Memories* concerns Wilde's attitude towards imputations of plagiarism:

[Wilde] knew at once that [*Salomé*] put me in mind of Flaubert. He admitted that he had not been able to resist the theft. 'Remember,' he said with amusing unction, 'dans la littérature il faut toujours tuer son père.' But I didn't think he had killed Flaubert; nor did he, I believe.¹²

Beardsley's presentation of Wilde as the god of thieves and pickpockets seems to me to be a reaction not just to Wilde's actual literary borrowing, but also to this kind of elaborate self-justification which accompanied it.

This leads to another layer of complexity in the allusion to theft in Beardsley's caricature of Wilde as Mercury. When Apollo discovered that Mercury had stolen his cattle and went to charge him with the crime, he was so charmed by the sounds of Mercury's lyre that he allowed him to keep the cattle, and became his friend. Wilde himself had always placed great emphasis on the musicality of his play, and consistently referred to *Salomé* as a piece of music: 'the recurring phrases of *Salomé*, that bind it together like a piece of music with recurring motifs are, and were to me, the artistic equivalent of the refrains of old ballads.'¹³ Presumably Beardsley, aware of Wilde's musical pretensions in *Salomé*, takes this opportunity to make a further

¹² *Men and Memories*, I, p. 184.

¹³ *The Letters of Oscar Wilde*, p. 590.

reference to Wilde's attitude towards his plagiarism by suggesting that Wilde was confident his play was so good he would be forgiven the theft.

Mercury was also the god of trade, and in the 1890s 'trade' was the widely used slang term for male prostitution.¹⁴ Even before the revelations forced by Wilde's trial of 1895, it was common knowledge amongst Wilde's friends that he and Douglas visited 'renters', and indeed these young men were often present at suppers given by Wilde at Kettner's or the Café Royal (according to the moral codes of the day, this was as much an outrage to the class system as to sexual propriety). In the autumn of 1892 Wilde, under the influence of Douglas, had begun to frequent male brothels, and during 1893 he established the practice of staying in London hotels rather than at the family home in Tite Street. He stayed at the Albemarle Hotel until the manager, Aloys Vogel, began to complain about the succession of young men Wilde would invite back for the night. In September 1893 Wilde rented rooms at 10, St James's Place.¹⁵ Ostensibly allowing him to 'work undisturbed', as he writes in *De Profundis*, this arrangement also provided the opportunity for him to liaise with male prostitutes.

With this allusion to trade in the context of the messenger god, Beardsley surely refers to modern messengers: telegraph boys, or 'young modern mercuries' in the words of Timothy d'Arch Smith.¹⁶ In the early 1890s there was a high level of anxiety about the morality of telegraph boys; the combination of low wages - generally around twelve shillings per week - and time spent waiting for telegrams to deliver in unsupervised rest rooms meant that many fell into prostitution.¹⁷ Telegraph boys were notorious for their involvement in sex scandals at around this time. The most famous and widely reported case was that of the brothel in Cleveland Street; when this establishment was investigated by the police in 1889, it was found that a number of telegraph boys worked there.¹⁸ Douglas himself was involved with a telegraph boy whilst he was at Oxford.¹⁹ Moreover, according to the memoirs of Edmund Trelawny Backhouse, Beardsley once related to him that one night during an after-theatre supper at the Savoy Wilde 'boasted of having had five love affairs and resultant copulations with telegraph and district messenger boys in one night.'²⁰ Backhouse's memoirs are notoriously unreliable and probably largely fabricated, yet

¹⁴ Farmer and Henley, VII, p. 188; Green, p. 254.

¹⁵ Beardsley took these same rooms after selling his house in 1895.

¹⁶ Timothy d'Arch Smith, *Love in Earnest* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), p. 29. I am grateful to Dr Jason Edwards for this reference.

¹⁷ M. J. Daunt, *Royal Mail: The Post Office Since 1840* (London: Athlone, 1985), p. 203.

¹⁸ See Theo Aronson, *Prince Eddy and the Homosexual Underworld* (London: John Murray, 1994); Colin Simpson, Lewis Chester and David Leitch, *The Cleveland Street Affair* (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown, 1976); H. Montgomery Hyde, *The Cleveland Street Scandal* (London: W. H. Allen, 1976). Much to the horror of the GPO, they went there in uniform (Robert Meadley, *Sex Scandals*, 2nd edn. (London: Xanadu, 1990), p. 191).

¹⁹ Aronson, p. 7.

²⁰ Sir Edmund Trelawny Backhouse, *The Dead Past* (Peking: [n. pub.], 1943), p. 69.

the very fact that he framed the thought gives weight to the general idea that telegraph boys often made themselves available as prostitutes, and that Wilde was known for his patronage of them.

These scandals are reflected in contemporary discourse. John Gambriel Nicholson, one of the Uranian poets of the 1890s, wrote in his 1911 collection of poems *A Garland of Ladslove* that chief among the many 'smart looking lads' he admired was 'the lad that's lettered GPO'.²¹ Moreover, when Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* appeared in 1890 the Cleveland Street scandal was fresh enough in the public mind for one reviewer to complain that Wilde was writing for none but 'outlawed noblemen and perverted telegraph boys...'²² Significantly, Beardsley makes another joke which plays on the cross-over between male prostitutes and messenger boys later in the year, during the last period of difficult negotiations with Lane, when he writes to Ross: 'I suppose you've heard all about the *Salomé* row. I can tell you I had a warm time of it between Lane and Oscar and Co. For one week the numbers of telegraph and messenger boys who came to the door was simply scandalous.'²³ In a letter to Reggie Turner written between Wilde's trials, on May 3rd 1895, Beerbohm describes a recent evening at the Leversons' home, the night before Douglas's crossing to France. He records 'Mrs Leveson making flippant remarks about messenger-boys in a faint undertone to Bosie...'²⁴ So for a brief period telegraph boys and rent boys were synonymous. In presenting Wilde as Mercury, the messenger god and the god of trade, Beardsley frames a joke about Wilde's patronage of male prostitutes and his well-known predilection for working class boys.

The gesture Wilde makes with his extended right hand is also, according to classical oratorical treatises, significant as a homosexual signal. In one such work, the Roman orator Dio Chrysostom (c. 40-115 AD) comments on the habit of effeminate homosexual men of conversing 'with upturned palms'.²⁵ Moreover, according to Quintilian's account of rhetorical gesture in *De Institutione Oratoria*, it was not proper to bring the hand beyond the level of the shoulder. So Wilde's gesture is, according to the conventionalised gestures of the classical rhetorician, one which revealed both homosexuality and vulgarity.

The symbolism of Wilde's owl hat is as complex as that of his caduceus. The owl has always been popularly associated with wisdom, a quality Wilde frequently and publicly claimed. However, not only does this owl wink, a subversive gesture, it is also decorated with bells, like a jester's cap; both devices undercut the owl's

²¹ John Gambriel Nicholson, *A Garland of Ladslove* (London: F. E. Murray, 1911), p. 27.

²² Anon., *Scots Observer*, 5 July 1890, p. 181.

²³ *The Letters of Aubrey Beardsley*, p. 58.

²⁴ *Letters to Reggie Turner*, p. 104.

²⁵ Bremmer, p. 22.

conventional associations. In the late nineteenth century an 'owl' was a slang term for someone whose superficial wisdom masked underlying foolishness. Furthermore, it was also a slang term for a prostitute, presumably because of their nocturnal activity, so there is perhaps also another allusion to rent boys here.²⁶

The identification of Wilde as a jester, symbolised by the bells on his cap, undermines his status as a serious author with the suggestion that his rôle is to entertain with jokes, like a court fool. The genial comedian was one of Wilde's principal personæ, yet since this caricature occurs in the serious play *Salomé*, the jester's costume implies that Wilde is incapable of being anything other than this, and that he fails to attain the serious literary status he so desired.

Like Wilde's caduceus, his owl cap also has more esoteric references. A poet greatly admired by Beardsley was Alexander Pope, and here the owl seems very likely to refer specifically to Pope's *Dunciad* (1728, 1729, 1742 and 1743), the mock-heroic narrative poem which satirises poetic 'dulness' and incompetence.²⁷ The poem describes how Colley Cibber is enthroned as Poet Laureate by the Goddess of Dulness during a ceremony which culminates in a test for critics to decide whether they are able to stay awake whilst the works of two authors are recited. Cibber is then literally crowned with an owl:

The Goddess then, o'er his anointed head,
 With mystic words, the sacred opium shed.
 And lo! her bird (a monster of a fowl,
 Something betwixt a Heideggre and owl)
 Perched on his crown...
 I. 287

So in crowning Wilde with an owl Beardsley presents him in Cibber's place, as the anointed Poet Laureate of Dulness. Moreover, early editions of *The Dunciad*, of the type in which Beardsley is most likely to have read the poem, are decorated with a head-piece in which, flanked by the heads of asses and thistles, an owl wears a jester's cap (figure 48). On a banner above is a Latin tag, 'NEMO ME IMPVNE LACESSIT' - no-one who provokes me goes unpunished. Wilde's owl hat in 'Enter Herodias' resembles this owl so closely that I believe it to have served as a model. Beardsley presents himself as arch satirist Pope to Wilde's incompetent poet Cibber.

²⁶ Farmer and Henley, V, p. 117. The *OED* entry for 'owl' includes the following definition: 'Applied to a person in allusion to nocturnal habits, to literal or figurative repugnance to light, to appearance of gravity and wisdom (often with implication of underlying stupidity).'

²⁷ Apparently Wilde once mocked Beardsley's preference, when he remarked in his presence that there were two ways of disliking poetry: one was to dislike it, the other was to like Pope. (Alfred Douglas, *Oscar Wilde and Myself* (New York, 1914), p. 197.) Beardsley went on to illustrate *The Rape of the Lock* in 1896.

Beardsley continues to play on the classical theme with this prop, as the owl was an attribute of the goddess Athene, and is commonly found on the reverse of Ancient Greek coins bearing her image, frequently perched on a pile of books. If Beardsley intended this classical reference, which given his complex play on Mercury's symbolism seems likely, then he is probably making another allusion to the nature of Wilde's literary standing by implying that its height was spurious, and only gained at the expense of other authors. The implication of coinage also serves to evoke ignoble mercenary aims. There is possibly another reference to *The Dunciad* here, the title page of which shows an ass laden with a pile of books by various authors, on the top of which perches an owl (figure 49). The joke is the same as in Partridge's 1892 caricature, but expressed in subtler and more esoteric terms; not available to a wide audience, such humour would have been readily understandable to a small, literary, classically educated circle constituted by friends of Beardsley's and of Wilde's.

Caricature of Beatrice Whistler

Compelling evidence suggests to me that in 'Enter Herodias' Herodias is not just a fictional figure but also a caricature of Whistler's wife Beatrice (figure 50). A few months after he was working on the *Salomé* commission, early in 1894, Beardsley made a drawing which he called 'The Fat Woman' for the *Yellow Book*, which was an unequivocal caricature of Beatrice Whistler (figure 51). For this reason Lane refused to publish this drawing.²⁸ The cast of features in 'Enter Herodias' is identical to that in the slightly later drawing, 'The Fat Woman': the fleshy neck, the double chin, the full pursed mouth, the retroussé nose, the wide set long narrow eyes, the sharp angle of the eyebrows and the low brow all appear in both (figure 52). Beatrice's physical presence was also directly comparable to that of Herodias in this illustration. One source relates that she 'was large, so that Whistler was dwarfed beside her'.²⁹ Moreover, Beardsley caricatured Whistler himself three times soon after the publication of *Salomé*, once as a full-page grotesque in one of the *Bon Mots* books,³⁰ once as a faun on the title page of *The Dancing Faun* by Florence Farr (published by Mathews and Lane in June 1894), and once in a drawing which Beardsley made for the sole purpose of hanging on his Christmas tree in 1896.³¹

²⁸ See *The Letters of Aubrey Beardsley*, pp. 65-66, for Beardsley's response to Lane's qualms. Beardsley suggests that the drawing should be called 'A Study in Major Lines', a pun on Whistler's musical titles. This drawing was actually published in *To-Day*, 12 March 1894.

²⁹ E. R. and J. Pennell, *The Life of James McNeill Whistler* (London: Heinemann, 1911), p. 268.

³⁰ *Bon Mots of Samuel Foote and Theodore Hook*, ed. by Walter Jerrold (London: J. M. Dent, 1894), p. 190. This caricature is unique in Beardsley's *Bon Mots* series of grotesques and vignettes as a straightforward and unmistakable caricature.

³¹ *The Letters of Aubrey Beardsley*, p. 230.

Beardsley was not alone in his impulse to caricature Whistler. In a letter to Rothenstein of mid April 1894 Beerbohm parodies Whistler's self aggrandising style, and adds in a postscript 'Whistler once made London a half-way house between New York & Paris & wrote rude things in the visitor's book.'³²

Beardsley's attitude towards Whistler was ambivalent. A letter to an old school friend of 1891 reveals Beardsley's great admiration of the artist's work: he describes the painting *Miss Alexander* as 'a truly glorious, indescribable, mysterious and evasive picture'.³³ This admiration extends to Whistler's barbed wit; Beardsley asks his friend if he has seen a group of letters Whistler had recently written to the *Pall Mall Gazette*, and remarks 'somewhat amusing'.³⁴ However, his admiration was rebuffed. In May 1893, during Beardsley's trip to Paris with the Pennells, Whistler, a friend of Joseph Pennell's, had ostentatiously ignored Beardsley.³⁵ Beardsley had been greatly offended, and it seems to have been entirely in character for him to have seen an opportunity to reply to Whistler's snub with this caricature of his wife, and with the slightly later drawing 'The Fat Woman'.

However, this is not a random caricature, but an act of casting. Beatrice Whistler had been married to E. W. Godwin before her marriage to Whistler - the two men had been close friends - just as Herodias had been married to Herod's brother before Herod. In Wilde's play *Iokanaan* levels accusations of unrestrained sexual voracity at Herodias: 'Where is she who saw the images of men painted on the walls, even the images of the Chaldæans painted with colours, and gave herself up unto the lust of her eyes, and sent ambassadors into the land of Chaldæa? ... Where is she who gave herself unto the Captains of Assyria, who have baldricks on their loins...?'³⁶ In the light of Beardsley's caricature, in which Herodias is played by the matronly Beatrice, married to the acidulated Whistler, *Iokanaan's* elaborate accusations of her unquenchable lust become comic, if rather puerile, material. With this caricature more than any other Beardsley holds Wilde's rich and repetitive literary style hostage to his own comic agenda. The stylistically richer *Iokanaan's* accusations and the more often they are repeated, the funnier the joke.

With this caricature Beardsley may have hoped to stir up further trouble between Whistler and Wilde, a result which would have amused him as well as friends such as Beerbohm and Rothenstein. Beerbohm's sheet of drawings made in 1893 entitled 'Aspects of Wilde' demonstrates this comedic interest in the

³² *Max and Will*, p. 27.

³³ *The Letters of Aubrey Beardsley*, p. 25.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

³⁵ Stanley Weintraub, *Beardsley: A Biography* (New York: George Braziller, 1967), pp. 52-53.

³⁶ *Complete Works*, p. 557.

relationship between the older men, as it includes a caricature of Wilde fencing with Whistler, with the caption: ‘Mr Whistler rather worsted him in “Truth”’.³⁷

Caricature of Lord Alfred Douglas

Photographs of Douglas taken in May 1893 when he was in his last year at Magdalen College, Oxford, show a small effeminate young man with blond curly hair, narrowed eyes with puffy lower lids, a full but rather weak mouth, a long rounded chin, a short upper lip, and strong dark eyebrows (figure 53). I find the resemblance between Douglas at around this moment and Herodias’s page, the figure to the right in this illustration, striking, and I think that this is a caricature of him. In the frontispiece illustration ‘The Woman in the Moon’ and in ‘A Platonic Lament’, Beardsley had already set a precedent for the page’s cast of features, which are very different from those drawn here. The marked difference in treatment from one image to the other, and the far greater naturalism in the treatment of the face and body in ‘Enter Herodias’, seems to me to be a signal that some specific reference is being made.

A chalk and pastel drawing of Douglas in 1893 by Rothenstein reveals a remarkably similar cast of features to those in the drawing of Herodias’s page (figure 54). Beerbohm drew a caricature at around this time of Douglas and Wilde together which emphasise Douglas’s effeminacy in the same manner as this illustration (figure 55; figure 56). Moreover, the page holds an eyemask away from his face in a gesture suggestive of unmasking, which may be another clue that a specific identity is being revealed.³⁸

As I have said, by the time Beardsley was working on the *Salomé* commission Douglas was Wilde’s lover, and the two were frequently together. Beardsley had particular reason to dislike Douglas at this moment since Wilde had offered the work of translating *Salomé* to Douglas when Beardsley himself had offered to do it. Beardsley’s reaction to Douglas is given in his long letter to Ross from late November 1893, when he says of Douglas and Wilde ‘Both of them are really very dreadful people.’³⁹

The page looks disdainfully at Herodias’s breasts, and is clearly sexually indifferent to her nudity. In Wilde’s play Herodias’s page has a quasi-homosexual relationship with the young Syrian, Narraboth, who in turn is interested in Salomé, and who commits suicide when Salomé reveals her obsession with Iokanaan. In casting Douglas as the page Beardsley magnifies this textual implication of

³⁷ This drawing is in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

³⁸ I am grateful to Jad Adams for this interpretation.

³⁹ *The Letters of Aubrey Beardsley*, p. 58.

homosexuality and makes a clear and provocative point about Douglas's homosexual nature.

The point is further emphasised by the powder puff which the page holds in his left hand. In terms of the illustration, this is accounted for by his position as Herodias's servant; the reader expects him to stand ready with her requisites. Yet it also operates as a visual pun, since a 'powder puff' was a contemporary slang term for a homosexual man.⁴⁰ The implication is that the puff is a symbolic attribute of Douglas, and it can also be read as Douglas holding Wilde in the palm of his hand.

Another joke relating to the page/Douglas character concerns the fig leaf. Fig leaves have five points, not three, and the leaf here bears more relation to that of a vine. Earlier drawings like 'A Snare of Vintage' contain representations of vine leaves which are identical to that drawn here. If Beardsley was being botanically specific, the joke is about drunkenness. In contemporary slang used by this group, 'to wear vine leaves in one's hair' was to be drunk, so the reference is to Douglas's excessive drinking.⁴¹

The Grotesque

The appearance of the grotesque attendant, in the act of running on stage whilst Wilde gestures at his dramatic creation, but looks towards his audience, adds to the comedy of this drawing. Is Wilde unaware of the appearance of this deformed priapic monster? There seems to be another joke about Wilde's play here in the form of this monster's comic goggling stare, undercutting the portentous and insistent repetition in *Salomé* of such lines as 'You must not look at her. You look too much at her.'⁴²

This character is more intimately connected spatially with the Wilde figure than are Herodias and the page, who stand back and aloof. Just as there is movement created by his gaze towards Wilde, although Wilde does not look back at him the gesture with his right hand creates a similar movement back towards the attendant. The flare of the candle flame which mediates between Wilde's hand and the tip of the attendant's phallus underlines this direction of movement. It comedically suggests Wilde's ability to arouse 'fires of love', and also hints at a relationship between Wilde's sexual attention and a burning sensation of the glans. Moreover, if the title page design is the travesty of a Crucifixion and the tail piece is, as I will go on to suggest, the travesty of an Entombment, then Wilde's gesture here suggests to me that this is a debased *Ecce Homo* image, a carnival parody of the form.

⁴⁰ Green, p. 228. 'Poof', 'poove' and 'powder puff' all stem from 'puff'.

⁴¹ In a letter to Reggie Turner of 19th August 1893, Beerbohm writes: '...Oscar was at the last night of the Haymarket [of *A Woman of No Importance* on 16th August]: with him Bosie and Robbie and Aubrey Beardsley. The last of these had forgotten to put vine-leaves in his hair, but the other three wore rich clusters...' (*Letters to Reggie Turner*, pp. 52-53.)

⁴² *Complete Works*, p. 553.

This figure is stylistically similar to sixteenth-century wood-cut illustrations to Rabelais's famous work *Les Songes Drolatiques de Pantagruel*, a book which was printed in facsimile from the original by Librairie Tross, Paris, in 1869, and which Beardsley would almost certainly have seen (figure 57). The combination of grotesque, sexual and caricatural elements - the likeness of Pope Julius II appears no less than twenty-one times - is extremely similar to that which we find in Beardsley's work.⁴³ The grotesque quality of the figure and his draped erect penis, recurrent elements in the illustrations to Rabelais, surely have their source in these illustrations.

Again there is an esoteric narrative at work here. Although this figure's barely concealed phallus has always been interpreted in a purely sexual light,⁴⁴ I think it works as a comedic rather than an erotic signifier. Firstly, it is in a satirical and carnivalesque tradition of irreverent obscenity, and as such is comparable to the comedic phallic symbolism employed by Gillray and Callot which I discussed in chapter II. Secondly, it can be read in theatrical terms as part of a costume. We are, after all, looking at a stage performance in 'Enter Herodias'. I think that the allusion which Beardsley makes here is to the large artificial phalluses worn by comic actors in Ancient Greek drama.⁴⁵ As Laver remarks, evidence from vase paintings which depict comic drama shows that 'the phallus is exposed, and in some cases is of such enormous dimensions that it could not have been other than artificial.'⁴⁶ Moreover, these actors usually wore grotesque masks. Significantly for *Salomé*, a form of popular entertainment in Ancient Greece and Rome in which the actors were phallic and masked was the 'mythological burlesque' - a form in which the canonical themes treated so solemnly by Greek tragedians were parodied. Beardsley's grotesque figure here also wears something resembling the chiton of the tragic actor, a loose garment extending from the throat to the ankles, yet this costume is entirely inadequate as a disguise for his prominent comedic phallus. So with this inclusion of a comic actor Beardsley implies that in his treatment of a canonical theme Wilde had unwittingly written a burlesque, and that in *Salomé* low farce masquerades as high tragedy.⁴⁷

⁴³ Rabelais, *Les Songes Drolatiques de Pantagruel, ou sont contenues plusieurs figures de l'invention de maistre François Rabelais: & dernière œuvre d'iceluy, pour la récreation des bons esprits [sic.]* (Paris: Richard Breton, 1565; repr. Mineola: Dover, 1995), p. 3.

⁴⁴ Reade, *Beardsley*, p. 337, n. 285; Zatlín, *Aubrey Beardsley*, p. 4 and p. 87; Snodgrass, *Aubrey Beardsley*, p. 226.

⁴⁵ Allardyce Nicoll, *Masks, Mimes and Miracles: Studies in the Popular Theatre* (London: Harrap, 1931), pp. 20-21.

⁴⁶ Laver, *Costume in the Theatre*, p. 26.

⁴⁷ The drawing for 'Enter Herodias', in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, shows faint pencil underdrawing around this figure which demonstrates that in Beardsley's first draft he was not phallic, nor dressed in a chiton, but he wore the kind of loose shirt belted at the hips which Beardsley frequently gave his male figures. The joke inherent in the phallus must have occurred to Beardsley late on, as the drawing was in progress. This interpretation of the figure as a phallic

Plagiarism

Another satirical reference to Wilde's literary borrowing is embodied in the figure of Herodias. If the title 'Enter Herodias' refers obliquely to the abandoned stage performance of *Salomé*, it also refers to Flaubert's novella 'Herodias', the work cited by so many critics as Wilde's principal source for his play. Wilde admitted his debt to Flaubert to Beerbohm, saying 'Of course I plagiarise. It is the privilege of the appreciative man. I never read Flaubert's *Tentation de St Antoine* without signing my name at the end of it.'⁴⁸ In Flaubert's story a dramatic climax occurs when Herodias enters the banqueting hall:

Suddenly the panels of the golden balcony were folded back, and in a blaze of tapers, surrounded by her slaves and festoons of anemones, Herodias appeared. On her head she wore an Assyrian mitre held in place by a chinstrap; her hair spread in ringlets over a scarlet peplum, which was slit down the length of the sleeves. With two stone monsters, like those which guard the treasury of the Atrides, flanking the door, she looked like Cybele standing between her lions.⁴⁹

Beardsley's choice of subject seems to be prompted not by Wilde's play but by Flaubert's description: here we see Herodias's theatrical entrance, the blaze of tapers and her slaves on either side. Slits in her costume are also represented. Elsewhere in 'Herodias' Iokanaan describes 'the little golden crescents that tremble on [Herodias's] brow',⁵⁰ crescents which appear in her hair in Beardsley's illustration. In a satirical *coup de théâtre*, Beardsley bypasses Wilde's interpretation and illustrates his plagiarised source, with Wilde proudly presenting this scene from another author's work.

This satirical method of referring to works by other authors was also employed by Levenson in 'An Afternoon Tea Party'. As Margaret Debelius writes, 'In "An Afternoon Tea Party" Levenson introduced several of Wilde's characters to a star-studded collection of guests from the contemporary stage, including Nora from Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and Hilda Wangel from his *The Master Builder*, Dora from Victorien Sardou's *Dora*, Madame Santuzza from Pietro Mascagni's *Cavalleria rusticana*, Charley's Aunt from Brandon Thomas's play of the same name, and Mrs.

comic actor, rather than as a sexually aroused monster, also makes it clearer why Lane thought he might get away with publishing this illustration.

⁴⁸ *Letters to Reggie Turner*, p. 36.

⁴⁹ 'Les panneaux de la tribune d'or se déployèrent tout à coup; et à la splendeur des cierges, entre ses esclaves et des festons d'anémone, Hérodiade apparut, - coiffée d'une mitre assyrienne qu'une mentonnière attachait à son front; ses cheveux en spirales s'épandaient sur un péplos d'écarlate, fendu dans la longueur des manches. Deux monstres en pierre, pareils à ceux du trésor des Atrides, ce dressant contre la porte, elle ressemblait à Cybèle accotée de ses lions...' First published in *Trois Contes* in 1877, here quoted from *Three Tales*, trans. by Robert Baldick (London: Penguin Books, 1961), p. 120.

⁵⁰ '... les petits croissants d'or qui tremblent sur ton front...' *Ibid.*, p. 108.

Tanqueray from Arthur Pinero's *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*.⁵¹ Debelius points out that this staffage indicated Wilde's plagiarism: 'These guests were not only popular stage figures, they were also the very characters that critics have claimed Wilde had cribbed to create his own dramas [...] By juxtaposing Wilde's characters with these well-known figures of the 1890s, Levenson exposed his debt to his peers.'⁵²

Beardsley's illustration of a passage from Flaubert's 'Herodias' works in precisely the same way, and suggests his own debt to Levenson's parodic methodology; in this image Herodias doubles as a character from Wilde's play and a character from Flaubert's.

Sexual jokes

As I discussed in chapter II, the handle of Wilde's caduceus forms a phallic shape. This joke is continued by the penile candlesticks at the bottom of the image, which as Reade points out are a visual pun on the old name for candlesticks, prickets.⁵³ These candlesticks undercut the emblematic allusion of the caduceus handle by abandoning symbolism for the real thing - the suggestively phallic becomes the baldly penile. The attendant's phallus is thus thrown further into question: is it a real erect penis, given that, unlike the other phallic shapes, it appears in situ? Or is it a comedy actor's false phallus? I want to suggest that these qualitatively different kinds of penile imagery exist to tease a reader (perhaps specifically Lane) in search of sexual details.

'Enter Herodias' interrupts the sequence of ostensibly illustrative images by its representation of a stage performance, which amounts to a startlingly frank acknowledgement of the play's fictionality. Beardsley uses this interruption to present his image as not merely critical of the play, like most others, but as privileged to express a distanced critical overview. Its powerful inversion of the author/illustrator hierarchy gives Beardsley the upper hand.

⁵¹ Margaret Debelius, 'Countering a Counterpoetics: Ada Levenson and Oscar Wilde', in *Women and British Aestheticism*, ed. by Talia Schaffer and Kathy Alexis Psomiades (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1999), p. 200

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Reade, *Beardsley*, p. 337, n. 285.

Section viii

The Eyes of Herod (figure 58)

'The Eyes of Herod' illustrates the insistent refrain in the play that Herod looks too much at Salomé. On entering the stage, Salomé's first lines are 'I will not stay. I cannot stay. 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. I know not what it means. In truth, yes I know it.'¹ As soon as Herod and Herodias enter the stage, this theme continues:

HEROD: Where is Salomé? Where is the Princess? Why did she not return to the banquet as I commanded her? Ah! There she is!

HERODIAS: You must not look at her! You are always looking at her!²

Shortly afterwards, when Herod is told of Narraboth's suicide, he remarks that Narraboth 'looked languorously at Salomé. Truly, I thought he looked too much at her', to which Herodias replies 'There are others who look at her too much.'³ 'The Eyes of Herod' is printed opposite the page of text which begins with Herod looking at Salomé and commenting on her pallor, at which Herodias says 'I have told you not to look at her.' and which includes her line 'Why are you always gazing at her?' Several subsequent times Herodias repeats the line 'you must not look at her'.⁴

The image bears a double burden; as well as illustrating the titular theme of Herod's lustful stare, 'The Eyes of Herod' also illustrates a passage from the play in which Herod offers Salomé an elaborate litany of increasingly costly bribes in an attempt to deflect her attention away from her desire for Iokanaan's head. The two themes are joined in one of Herod's speeches to Salomé:

[...] It is true, I have looked at you all evening. Your beauty troubled me. Your beauty has grievously troubled me, and I have looked at you too much. But I will look at you no more. Neither at things, or at people should one look. [...] Salomé - nay, but come nearer to me; I fear you will not hear me - Salomé, you know my white peacocks, my beautiful white peacocks, that walk in the garden between the myrtles and the tall cypress trees. Their beaks are gilded with gold, and the grains that they eat are gilded with gold also, and their feet are stained with purple. When they cry out the rain comes, and the moon shows herself in the heavens when they spread their tails. Two by two they walk between the cypress trees and the black myrtles, and each has a slave to tend it. Sometimes they fly across the trees and anon they crouch in the grass, and round the lake. There are not in all the world birds so wonderful. There is no king in all the world who possesses such wonderful birds. I am sure that

¹ *Complete Works*, p. 555.

² *Ibid.*, p. 561.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 562.

⁴ *Ibid.*

Cæsar himself has no birds so fine as my birds. I will give you fifty of my peacocks. They will follow you whithersoever you go, and in the midst of them you will be like the moon in the midst of a great white cloud ... I will give them all to you. I have but a hundred, and in the whole world there is no king who has peacocks like unto my peacocks. But I will give them all to you. Only you must loose me from my oath, and must not ask of me that which you have asked of me.⁵

'The Eyes of Herod' pictures forth Herod's verbal imagery. The two putti at the bottom of the image, carrying an elaborate torchère, usher in an exemplary peacock from Herod's flock for Salomé to see, which emerges from behind the cypress trees described by Herod and a garden trellis against which grow the usual carnation-like flowers.

The illustration is overtly dramatic; the candles borne by the putti illuminate the scene between the black planes on either side of the image like a spotlight, and apart from Salomé's head-dress, Herod and Salomé are drained of detail by the strong light into spare linear forms, without any of the costume detail which appears in some of the other illustrations.

The sweeping line at the right of the image, which delineates Herod's cloak from his shoulder to the edge of the picture frame, and his low stature in relation to Salomé, implies that he sits enthroned.⁶ He faces forward but looks out of the corners of his eyes towards Salomé, ostensibly an illustration of the lustful gaze which Herod continually casts upon his stepdaughter. Salomé stands - looming over the scene - at centre left. She looks neither at Herod nor at the peacock below her, nor at the attendant putti, but with an expression of displeasure, and with half lowered eyelids, gazes into the middle distance, absorbed in a reverie, unmoved by Herod's pleas.

Caricature

As in the other illustrations, what may be read as a faithful rendition of a scene in the play also carries an excess of jokes and incidental commentary, and one of the satirical allusions in 'The Eyes of Herod' is to homosexuality. It is generally acknowledged that Herod's features in this illustration are another caricature of Wilde's.⁷ The title of the illustration draws attention to his eyes above all other aspects of the image, and given the codification of facial expression which I discussed in the earlier section on the frontispiece drawing, this surreptitious stare presents Wilde as dishonest and shifty, and in terms of Ancient Greek physiognomics, an effete homosexual.⁸ Wilde's identification with Herod in this context suggests he is

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 571.

⁶ This is how Herod appears in one of the most famous of the late nineteenth-century depictions of Herod's court, Gustave Moreau's painting 'Salomé Dancing Before Herod' (1876).

⁷ Reade, *Beardsley*, p. 336; Kooistra, p. 138.

⁸ Bremmer, p. 23.

also guilty of voyeuristic lechery, just as in both 'The Woman in the Moon' and 'A Platonic Lament' he is presented as a voyeur. Beardsley turns the unflattering textual description of Herod's unrequited lustful gazing, his 'mole's eyes under his shaking eyelids', against Wilde himself. However, here Salomé is the substitute for the young men at whom Wilde gazes in 'The Woman in the Moon' and 'A Platonic Lament', and Wilde's expression - as his gaze directly meets Salomé's exposed breast, rather than her face - is one of displeasure. He frowns markedly, an expression he does not wear in these other caricatures, and which implies sexual aversion to women.

Just as 'The Woman in the Moon' and 'A Platonic Lament' form a mini-sequence, there are strong links between 'The Eyes of Herod' and the previous illustration. Wilde's/Herod's physical position in relation to Salomé here repeats Douglas's/the page's position in relation to Herodias in 'Enter Herodias'. Both are at eye level with female breasts, and both are sexually indifferent to this display. This visual echo in the two caricatures creates a link from one illustration to the next between Wilde and Douglas, one which surely implies their similar homosexual natures.

Visual Puns and Sexual Allusions

Beardsley's play on the eye/nipple theme, which is strongly worked in the figure of the terminal god in the title page and comedically used in 'The Woman in the Moon', recurs here, since Wilde's/Herod's gaze meets Salomé's nipple as though it were an eye. This resemblance also works the other way; the circle of dots around his eyes echo the aureole around Salomé's nipple. The circular patterns of dots around the candle flames contribute to nipple symbolism, and this is also taken up by the peacock feather patterns and the nipple-like knot on the right hand cypress tree. These visual jokes contribute to a comedic commentary on the erotically charged theme of looking in Wilde's *Salomé*.

As Simon Wilson remarks, the image contains 'a multitude of phallic symbols: the candelabrum with its candles, held by the twin putti, the rampant peacock's head, the trees.'⁹ The presence of phalluses and penises in the previous illustration 'Enter Herodias' is echoed symbolically here. Just as in that illustration Wilde reaches towards the grotesque attendant's phallus above the penile candlesticks, here his gaze towards Salomé is mediated by the phallic candles, another allusion to sexual inclination.

⁹ Simon Wilson, *Beardsley*, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Phaidon, 1983), plate 12.

Plagiarism

'The Eyes of Herod' also hosts a subtle satiric commentary on plagiarism, as Whistler is evoked in this illustration. As I discussed in my previous commentaries on the title page and 'The Peacock Skirt', references to Whistler imply the quarrel between Wilde and Whistler, suggest the plagiarism which Whistler constantly attributed to Wilde and refer to Whistler's attitude towards his patron in his creation of the Peacock Room, an attitude espoused by Beardsley in the *Salomé* commission. Here a Whistlerian butterfly in the top left hand corner appears to look down on the proceedings. Moreover, the peacock, with feathers represented by abstract patterns of dotted crescents and clusters of ovoid forms, is, like that in 'The Peacock Skirt', copied directly from the murals in Whistler's Peacock Room.

The plagiarism theme is continued in Salomé's costume, which, like the figure of Herodias in the previous illustration, encapsulates a reference to Flaubert. It closely follows a description of Salammbô's dress: 'her head-dress was composed of peacock feathers starred with jewels; a wide cloak, white as snow, fell back behind her...'¹⁰ Beardsley includes this patchwork of visual references as an ironic commentary upon Wilde's literary borrowing.

The Grotesque

The putti in this illustration, like the grotesque winged figures in the title page and border design, the hunchback dwarf in 'A Platonic Lament' and the lutenist in 'The Stomach Dance', are Beardsley's own inventions, his staffage figures, grotesque extras in his libertarian 'staging' of *Salomé*. The putti's linear completeness, contrasting with the vague abstract spaces into which Salomé and Herod dissolve, and their foregrounding, make them appear to be more real, half way between the world of the illustration and the reader's world; they are the principal focus of the image. The right hand putto plants his left foot very firmly on Beardsley's border line, and the left hand putto puts the toes of his right foot upon it. Both also support themselves by stepping on the space behind the frame, as though this space and the frame are continuous, at least for them. Whilst Herod and Salomé seem to be statically engaged in their fixed stares, the putti are lively: the putto on the left appears to shout or exclaim as he looks over his shoulder at something, and that on the right, as he steps backwards, gazes directly out of the picture at the reader. Functioning like Beardsley's other grotesque extras, the putto which meets our eye establishes himself as our intermediary or agent, our proxy within the book. The reader is warned to

¹⁰ 'Elle avait une coiffure faite avec des plumes de paon étoilées de pierreries; un large manteau, blanc comme de la neige, retombait derrière elle.' Here quoted from Gustave Flaubert, *Salammbô*, trans. by A. J. Krailsheimer (London: Penguin, 1977), p. 277. *Salammbô* was first published in 1862.

beware of this observant figure by its companion, whose right hand, in grasping the shaft of the torchère, points the sign of the evil eye towards him.¹¹ The left hand putto's ostensibly child-like form is also made sinister, for its open mouth reveals two sharply pointed teeth, like those of a vampire.¹²

The distorted degree of significance granted the putti, the only elements of the image not described in Wilde's play, makes a clear point about Beardsley's subversive priorities, and echoes the acknowledgement of fictionality made in 'Enter Herodias'. In the act of holding a light up to the action of the play the putti allegorise illustration itself, a word which derives from the Latin *lustrare*, to light up. Similarly, they can be seen to represent a stage production of the play, facilitating the action by leading in the peacock like stage hands, and also directing strong light on a scene. They perhaps also symbolise Beardsley's professional relationship with Wilde, a situation in which Beardsley is privileged to infiltrate the text and to throw light on it. The author must submit to the illustrator's suggestive jokes in this arena where the normal hierarchy may be turned upside down and the illustrator gain ascendancy over the author. So the observant putto is not just the reader's guide to the image, but also Beardsley's symbolic presence within the text.

¹¹ As I discussed in the previous section on the border design, this sign is also the sign for the female pudendum, so in this context it functions as another symbol for homosexuality.

¹² This detail does not reproduce clearly in the line-block, but is apparent in the original drawing.

Section ix

The Stomach Dance (figure 59)

Salomé's dance is the key dramatic moment in the Salomé story, the pivot upon which the plot turns. Yet it can only be experienced by the audience at a performance of the play or by viewers of a visual representation. A bald stage direction, signalled simply in Wilde's unillustrated French edition of the play by '*Salomé danse la danse des sept voiles*', can only emphasise the inadequacy of a script as a medium of conveying anything other than the verbal exchange which forms only part of a dramatic transaction. The reader is conscious of a literary stalling, and of having to step over a central moment of the play which has been rendered opaque and silent by this particular literary form. In this instance illustration, the dramatic production's deputy within the book, performs a vital function, bridging a gap and picturing something which is beyond the scope of denotative text.

The subject of Salomé dancing before Herod was, by 1893, a familiar one for the visual arts. Salomé's popularity as a theme had had a number of peaks: her dance was often depicted in the middle ages in stained glass windows, in illuminated manuscripts, and on tympanums of medieval churches, the most famous of which is the banquet scene on the tympanum of the Cathedral of Rouen, where she appears dancing on her hands. The subject was revived during the Renaissance, and treated by Ghirlandaio, Titian, Andrea del Sarto and Fra Filippo Lippi amongst others.¹ The erotic potential offered by the combination of the femme-fatale, dancing, diaphanous eastern costume and voyeurism, all within the moral framework of a Biblical story, was irresistible for a late nineteenth-century audience, and the theme was used at this point by a number of artists.² So well known were representations of Salomé's dance by artists such as Moreau, who made many drawings and paintings of the subject, by the 1890s that even in an unillustrated edition of the story the author would have good reason to expect his or her readers to picture the scene, drawing on common visual memories of the subject.³ As I have suggested, it seems as though Wilde's own imaginary Salomé approximated to that depicted by Moreau, as he remarked that Beardsley's illustrations were 'too Japanese' to properly illustrate his 'Byzantine' play,⁴ a fitting adjective for the hieratic poses and lapidary surfaces of Moreau's various renditions of Salomé's dance, and indeed for the prose of Huysmans, no less

¹ See Helen Grace Zagona, *The Legend of Salomé and the Principle of Art for Art's Sake* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1960), p. 21.

² See Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 380-401.

³ See Françoise Meltzer, *Salomé and the Dance of Writing: Portraits of Mimesis in Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987) for a full discussion of this phenomenon.

⁴ *Men and Memories*, I, p. 184.

hieratic or lapidary, as he describes Moreau's paintings and drawings of Salomé in *A rebours*. Wilde's irritation seems to stem from Beardsley's appropriation of his theme; the unillustrated French edition could float on waters thick with textual and visual renditions of the story, referring vaguely and tacitly to all of them, whilst the illustrated English edition was hijacked by the strong presence of Beardsley's challenging images.

Beardsley was well aware of his power as *Salomé's* dramatiser, and in 'The Stomach Dance' he makes a specific reference to the abandoned stage performance. In 1892 Ricketts had been persuaded by Wilde to plan the stage design for *Salomé*, and he had proposed 'a black floor - upon which Salomé's white feet would show'.⁵ Ricketts's idea is borrowed by Beardsley here, a reminder of *Salomé's* failure to be produced, and of his own control of 'staging' in the book.

Drawing explicitly on other famous late nineteenth-century descriptions of Salomé's dance, Beardsley makes a number of jokes in 'The Stomach Dance' on the theme of Wilde's plagiarism.

Plagiarism

Salomé sways to music played by a lutenist, her movement denoted by her body's curve to the left, the sweep of the cloak or veil and the arabesque of flowers, although this movement is belied by the fixity of her facial expression. Her thick hair is tied back by bands, and in it she wears four decorations based on peacock feathers. She wears a large cloak which is wrapped around her right upper arm and which covers her left shoulder and arm, sweeps down between her thighs and flies off both to the left and to the right. On the left this cloak or veil becomes a phallic symbol, pointing up from between her thighs, and seeming to ejaculate carnations. Her breasts are exposed, and she wears a wide band around her middle, decorated with crescent shapes and a central carnation. As befits a belly dancer, her stomach is exposed. She wears thin, effectively transparent knee-length drawers with a frill at the knee, and

⁵ 'At the request of Oscar Wilde I sketched out a plan for *Salomé*, which at that time had a chance of being given in Paris, that is, before Madame Sarah Bernhardt thought of giving it in London. I do not remember if it was M. Lugné Poe who contemplated the production, but I rather fancy it was, since he produced the play some years later, when Wilde was in prison. Here is my scheme: I proposed a black floor - upon which Salomé's white feet would show; this statement was meant to capture Wilde. The sky was to be a rich turquoise blue, cut across by the perpendicular fall of strips of gilt matting, which should not touch the ground, and so form a sort of aerial tent above the terrace. Did Wilde actually suggest the division of the actors into separate masses of colour, to-day the idea seems mine! His was the scheme, however, that the Jews should be in yellow, the Romans were to be in purple, the soldiery in bronze green, and John in white. Over the dress of Salomé the discussions were endless: should she be black "like the night"? silver "like the moon"? or - here the suggestion is Wilde's - "green like a curious poisonous lizard"? I desired that the moonlight should fall upon the ground, the source not being seen; Wilde himself hugged the idea of some "strange dim pattern in the sky". Alas! He never lived to see *Salomé*: when I staged it, after his death, it was for a small dramatic club which had to consult economy.' (Charles Ricketts, *Pages on Art* (London: Constable, 1913), pp. 243-244.)

round both ankles are wreaths of carnations. On her left foot is a slipper, but not on her right, although her right foot is the same shape as the other, which does not suggest that it is bare. Carnations and half-moon shapes are left on the floor behind her feet, as though she progresses forwards in her dance, shaking flowers and crescent shapes from the garlands around her ankles.

This illustration is not, as we might expect, called 'The Dance of the Seven Veils', the dance specified by Wilde in his stage direction, but 'The Stomach Dance'. Beardsley's title is disconcerting; subtly disobedient, it cavils against the text. The alteration of such a crucial stage direction accentuates the independence of the narrative told by the illustrations from that set out by the text. It also indicates the potential for Beardsley's use of a source other than Wilde's play, and this is indeed the case. As Ian Fletcher has pointed out, in Beardsley's choice of a stomach dance rather than the dance of the seven veils he bypasses Wilde for Flaubert's 'Herodias'.⁶ Beardsley's depiction of Salomé's dance precisely illustrates one section of Flaubert's lengthy description:

With her eyes half-closed, she twisted her body backwards and forwards, making her belly rise and fall and her breasts quiver, while her face remained expressionless and her feet never stopped moving.⁷

As I described in my commentary on 'Enter Herodias', Flaubert's 'Herodias' was the most notorious of Wilde's sources for *Salomé*, mentioned most frequently by reviewers of the French edition of the play, so again this illustration amounts to an accusation of plagiarism.

Flaubert is not, however, the only source for this illustration. 'The Stomach Dance' also illustrates Jules Laforgue's parodic tale 'Salomé', published in *Moralités légendaires* (1887), in which during the description of Salomé's costume as she delivers her lecture on the Void the narrator refers to her 'small breasts with almond-nipples each tipped with a carnation'.⁸ Nipples elsewhere in the *Salomé* illustrations are either depicted realistically, or they resemble eyes, yet here they are replaced with carnations. Given the specificity of Laforgue's description, which tells us that Salomé wears a carnation on each nipple during her performance, it is clear that Beardsley is referring directly to this parodic version of the story. Moreover, the arabesque of flying carnations in the centre of the drawing also directly illustrates Laforgue. One of the entertainments to precede Salomé's speech which takes place on the stage of the

⁶ Fletcher, p. 87.

⁷ 'Les paupières entres-closes, elle se tordait la taille, balançait son ventre avec des ondulations de houle, faisait trembler ses deux seins, et son visage demeurait immobile, et ses pieds n'arrêtaient pas.' Here quoted from Flaubert, *Three Tales*, p. 121.

⁸ 'les deux soupçons de seins aux amandes piquées d'un œillet' Here quoted from Laforgue, *Moral Tales*, p. 102.

banqueting hall is described as ‘interludes of level cyclones of electrified flowers, a whirlwind of bouquets absolutely beside themselves!’⁹ Again, this illustration of another author’s work is openly disrespectful to Wilde and unfaithful to the integrity of his play. Moreover, the reference to Laforgue explicitly evokes a parodic reworking of a serious theme, which is Beardsley’s own project in the *Salomé* illustrations. Laforgue’s gleefully parodic rendition of the Salomé legend must have delighted and inspired Beardsley, especially since its principal target was Flaubert, Wilde’s greatest influence. Beardsley and Laforgue stand in equal relationship to Wilde and Flaubert, both devoting themselves to the task of sending up the ponderous seriousness of their chosen texts. There are great similarities between Laforgue and Beardsley, both of whom were innovators, coining phrases and creating a proto-Modernist style, and both of whom used burlesque and satire within their work. Laforgue’s absolute freedom of subject matter within the constraints of the parodic form also suggests similarity to Beardsley’s illustrative independence.

The references to the *Priapeia* which Beardsley makes in the title page illustration are continued here, as one of the appendices to the book is about dancing girls. In this section Smithers gives the following description of the costume commonly worn by the dancing girls of ancient Rome:

The costume of female acrobats was of the scantiest. In some designs the lower limbs of the figures are shown enveloped in thin drawers. From vase paintings we see that female acrobatic costume sometimes consisted solely of a decorated band swathed around the abdomen and upper part of the thighs, thus resembling in appearance the middle band adopted by modern acrobats¹⁰

Salomé here is dressed as just such an acrobat; her thin drawers and decorated band are a conflation of Smithers’s descriptions. The effect of this esoteric reference is to undermine Wilde’s text with erotic and decadent associations.

Anachronism and Bathos

This dance also undermines Wilde’s play through its modernity. On the right of the image Salomé’s veil or cloak swoops up into the air, away from her body, forming a major part of the composition; it is cut off by the framing lines, implying that it extends far beyond the area we are privileged to see. It seems plausible that this floating veil refers to the modern fashion for skirt dancing, made famous in the late 1880s and early 1890s by dancers such as Loïe Fuller, Marie Lloyd, Jennie Joyce and Marie Leyton. Skirt dancers performed by manipulating voluminous costumes of thin

⁹ ‘des intermèdes d’horizontaux cyclones de fleurs électrisées, une trombe horizontale de bouquets hors d’eux-mêmes!...’ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

¹⁰ *Priapeia*, p. 146.

silky fabric so that the material, as it hovered momentarily, created huge fantastic shapes in the air around the dancer (figure 60).¹¹ This is the third reference to music hall dancers, after the border design and 'The Black Cape'; here, as it stands in for the ancient mystery of the dance of the seven veils, it bathetically lowers the artistic tone of Wilde's play.¹²

The Grotesque

The floor upon which Salomé dances is used as a device for dividing the image into two sections; the pale musician is almost entirely contained within the lower part of the image, starkly defined against the black area, with only the tip of his lute penetrating the upper white space of the image. Salomé spans the two; her lower legs and feet are defined against the black floor, whilst from the knees up she is drawn against a blank white space. This way of spatially ordering the image divides areas of movement. The black area encompasses not only the wild and frenetic movement of the musician, but also Salomé's feet and the scattered evidence of their movement. In contrast, the white upper area is a space of deliberate and controlled movement: the fixity of Salomé's stare is the principal focal area, and even the air-borne carnations fly in strict formation.

Beardsley's signature is placed in the bottom right hand corner against the black floor, in the dark area reserved for anarchic, ungoverned activity. It is a counterpart to the musician in the other corner; like its positioning in 'A Platonic Lament', it sides with the grotesque and extra-textual element, articulating Beardsley's own approach to his illustrative task.

The figure of the musician owes a debt to Callot's *Gobbi* etchings, the grotesquely masked hunchbacks often depicted playing instruments. Beardsley's musician accompanies Salomé's dance on a lute, from the neck of which hang strings which curl and oscillate with his movement, counterparts to the arabesque of carnations directly above. The longest string forms the contour of a breast with a prominent nipple, adding to the total of similar visual jokes throughout the sequence. His hair creates an elaborate frondlike pattern, which combined with the effect of his costume of segmented puffed sleeves and tattered scraps of material gives him a

¹¹ See Diana Howard, *London Theatres and Music-Halls, 1850-1950* (London: Library Association, 1970); Daniel Farson, *Marie Lloyd and Music Hall* (London: Tom Stacey, 1972); Stokes, pp. 54-93. Symons wrote frequently of such music-hall dances, on one occasion describing Joyce in a review as 'a great white, silky bat'. Arthur Symons, 'Serpentine Dancing', *Star*, 2 August 1892.

¹² Skirt dancing is also treated comedically in E. F. Benson's 1897 novel *The Babe, B.A.*, when the central character the Babe, one of a group of male undergraduates at Cambridge, performs 'a skirt-dance in a sheet and a night-gown...' (E. F. Benson, *The Babe, B.A.: Being the Uneventful History of a Young Gentleman at Cambridge University* (London and New York: Putnam, 1897), p. 32.) The Babe is closely based on the wealthy undergraduate Herbert Pollitt, who was to become a friend and patron of Beardsley's.

fractured silhouette. His tight, segmented cuffs are identical to those worn by Wilde and by the grotesque attendant in 'Enter Herodias', and indeed his grotesque face aligns him with this latter figure. His physiognomy is deformed and bestial; warts and lumps further disfigure his misshapen features, and his tongue protrudes lasciviously from full, sensual lips. His seaweed-like hair, which waves in patterns as though he is under water, suggests that he is only partly human. This hair-transformation follows that of the garlanded head of the title-page herm, the snake-like hair of the title-page satyr, and the pointed masses of hair of the dwarf in 'A Platonic Lament', and links Beardsley's grotesque extras in their uncanny difference from Wilde's characters. He appears to whirl and play his instrument in a bacchanalian frenzy. The grotesqueness of the musician can be interpreted in part as another ironic comment on Wilde's extravagant claims for the solemn musical cadences of his play.

What at first glance looks like a costume detail below the lute, so flatly is it drawn against his stomach, turns out to be the musician's erect penis seen against his pubic hair. His lute is an exaggerated symbol of his phallus, its long neck pointing directly towards Salomé's pudendum. These phallic elements are closely related to Callot's depictions of deformed dwarves, whose musical instruments frequently echo the shapes of their erect penises (figure 61). The sexual arousal demonstrated by Beardsley's musician also corresponds to another passage in the essay on dancing girls in the *Priapeia* where Smithers quotes Ovid's *Amores* on the erotic appeal of dancers:

One pleases by her gestures, and moves her arms to time, and moves her graceful sides with languishing art in the dance; to say nothing about myself, who am excited on every occasion, put Hippolytus there - he would become a Priapus.¹³

This reaction also relates to 'Herodias', as Flaubert's description of Salomé's dance runs concurrently with a description of the sexual desire exhibited by the audience in the hall: 'the nomads inured to abstinence, the Roman soldiers skilled in debauchery, the avaricious publicans, and the old priests soured by controversy all sat there with their nostrils distended, quivering with desire.'¹⁴ However, Flaubert's solemn evocation of concentrated sexual desire is debased in Beardsley's representation. The musician's leer, protruding tongue and erect penis betray a comedic and grotesque response, not an erotic one. Moreover, he looks away from Salomé, not, like

¹³ *Priapeia*, p. 147.

¹⁴ 'et les nomades habitués à l'abstinence, les soldats de Rome experts en débauches, les avars publicains, les vieux prêtres aigris par les disputes, tous, dilatant leurs narines, palpitaient de convoitise.' Here quoted from Flaubert, *Three Tales*, p. 121.

Flaubert's audience, hypnotised, but playing to an audience himself, making a joke of his lechery and of Salomé's dance.

'The Stomach Dance' is an essay in undercutting irony. Firstly, the ostensible seriousness of Salomé's dance is dismantled by the precise references to Flaubert, Laforgue and the *Priapeia*, and by the bathetic gesture it makes towards skirt-dancing. Secondly, the sexual response of the musician, itself a completely unacceptable representation in the context of an illustration, is undercut by his comic grotesqueness. Every element of the image is made to serve Beardsley's satirical agenda.

Section x

'The Toilette of Salomé' (First Version) (figure 62)

Eroticism has always been considered to be the principal subject of 'The Toilette of Salomé'. Reade writes mainly of the 'erotic details' in the illustration¹, Fletcher calls the image 'a hymn to auto-eroticism'², Zatlin discusses it only as a scene of various kinds of masturbation,³ and Snodgrass describes 'a surfeit of cunningly disguised sexual "perversions."⁴

Indeed, the first version of 'The Toilette of Salomé' is the most overtly erotic of the illustrations Beardsley produced for *Salomé*. However, I think that Beardsley's 'hymn to auto-eroticism' has a counterpoint of a harsher nature. Throughout his work, whether pictorial or literary, Beardsley's impulse was always to undercut the sexual images he created, intervening with disconcertingly non-erotic elements. The grotesque and the parodic are always present to transfigure titillation. Linda Dowling has observed this same impulse in Beardsley's unfinished erotic novella *The Story of Venus and Tannhäuser*: 'the deflationary pressure of Beardsley's tale is irresistible as it reduces, first of all, the high-art theme ennobled in Wagner's opera and Swinburne's "Laus Veneris" to an occasion for pornographic variations, and then turns around to deflate the tumescent pretensions of pornography as well.'⁵ The gist of this observation could very well equally apply to 'The Toilette of Salomé', in which Beardsley's reduction of Wilde's high drama to a scene of playful eroticism is itself undercut by satire directed at the author.

In 'The Toilette of Salomé' the erotically charged atmosphere is counterpointed or challenged by a joke told by the furniture and objects of the room in which the toilette takes place. Rather than functioning simply as indicators that this is an intimate domestic environment, although they do this too, I think that these objects function together as a complex joke at Wilde's expense.

Plagiarism

'The Toilette of Salomé' has also been regarded as entirely irrelevant to Wilde's play, which contains no toilette scene, and symbolic of Beardsley's bold strike at illustrative independence in the *Salomé* illustrations. Whilst this is certainly the case, I

¹ Reade, *Beardsley*, p. 337, n. 288.

² Fletcher, p. 76.

³ Zatlin, *Aubrey Beardsley*, pp. 73-75.

⁴ Snodgrass, *Aubrey Beardsley*, p. 65.

⁵ Linda Dowling, *Language and Decadence in the Victorian Fin de Siècle* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 144. *Under the Hill* (the title of the expurgated story) was first published in the first number of the *Savoy* in January 1896. It was published in unexpurgated form as *The Story of Venus and Tannhäuser* by Leonard Smithers in 1907.

think that far from this being a capricious choice there is a satirical purpose behind Beardsley's choice of subject matter. Just as the appearance of Herodias in 'Enter Herodias' and Salomé's style of dance in 'The Stomach Dance' refer to a passage from Flaubert's 'Herodias', Salomé's costume in 'The Eyes of Herod' derives from Flaubert's *Salammbô* and the carnation-nipples in 'The Stomach Dance' refer to a descriptive passage from Laforgue's 'Salomé', so the motivation behind this toilette scene seems to me to be the toilette setting of another late nineteenth-century version of the Salomé theme, Stéphane Mallarmé's famous unfinished poem 'Hérodiade'. 'Hérodiade' is structured around a conversation between Princess Hérodiade (a name which was interchangeable in the nineteenth century with 'Salomé'⁶) and her nurse, which takes place at Hérodiade's dressing table:

HERODIAS: Enough, hold up this mirror.
Oh mirror!
 A cold water frozen with ennui in your frame,
 How often, for how long, unvisited
 Of dreams, and seeking my remembrances which are
 Like leaves beneath your ice's profoundness
 I to myself appeared a far-off shade.
 But ah! Some evenings in your severe fount
 I of my sparse dreams have known the nudity.⁷

Beardsley's depiction of Salomé at her dressing table in this illustration, in front of a mirror, seems to illustrate Mallarmé's poem. The attendant who brushes her hair is also present:

Come, and my tresses imitating the ways
 Too wild which make you dread a lion's mane,
 Help me, since thus you dare no longer look,
 To comb me nonchalantly in the glass.⁸

Again, Beardsley satirises Wilde's plagiarism with this illustration of what many critics considered to be one of his principal sources for *Salomé*.

This evocation of Mallarmé also strikes a personal note. Early in 1891 Wilde had met Mallarmé, and had attended a number of his famous *mardis*, when disciples would gather in order to listen to him talk. Mallarmé's unfinished poem 'Hérodiade'

⁶ Salomé's name came to be confused with that of her mother Herodias in the middle ages, and her Egyptian name Pharaildis was sometimes used. In the nineteenth century Heinrich Heine, Théodore de Banville and Mallarmé all used the name Herodias. (Zagona, pp. 20-21.)

⁷ 'Assez! Tiens devant moi ce miroir. / O miroir! / Eau froide par l'ennui dans ton cadre gelée / Que de fois et pendant des heures, désolée / Des songes et cherchant mes souvenirs qui sont / Comme des feuilles sous ta glace au trou profond / Je m'apparus en toi comme une ombre lointaine, Mais, horreur! des soirs, dans ta sévère fontaine, / J'ai de mon rêve épars connu la nudité!' Here quoted from Stéphane Mallarmé, *Poems*, trans. by Roger Fry (London: Chatto & Windus, 1936), pp. 81-83.

⁸ 'Viens et ma chevelure imitant les manières / Trop farouches qui font votre peur des crinières, / Aide-moi, puisqu'ainsi tu n'oses plus me voir, / A me peigner nonchalamment dans un miroir.' *Ibid.*, p. 81.

became a principal catalyst in Wilde's decision to treat the same theme.⁹ Wilde's attendance at these *mardis* elicited an angry response from Whistler, himself a close friend of Mallarmé. On Monday 2nd November 1891, knowing that Wilde was visiting the next day, Whistler wrote to Mallarmé with an explicit warning that Wilde would take the opportunity to plagiarise from him:

My dear friend - my tasks are done - so I am leaving - You have made my visit very pleasant - as you always do. So it's a bit ungrateful of me not to stay and denounce Oscar Wilde in front of your disciples tomorrow evening!

It's a service I owe you - I'm well aware of that - and it would even have contributed to the conviviality of your evening!

Mallarmé's *mardis* are now historical - exclusive and reserved for artists who are *honest* - Entry to them is a privilege and a proof of worth - a distinction that makes us proud. And the Master's Door should not be crashed by any jokester who crosses the Channel so as to gain respect later by retailing on the cheap the conversational blooms and the weighty truths Our Poet offers in such good temper! Farewell.¹⁰

Beardsley may have heard of this, or a similar altercation, through Rothenstein, who knew Whistler well and who also attended Mallarmé's *mardis* during his stay in Paris in 1891.¹¹

Here Beardsley simultaneously sends up 'Hérodiade' itself, an act which can be interpreted as a challenge to Wilde's admiration of the poet.¹² In 'The Toilette of Salomé' Mallarmé's great symbolist poem acquires the setting of a domestic interior, Hérodiade's intense introspection is represented by Salomé's masturbatory reverie, and the metaphoric nudity which Hérodiade experiences in front of her mirror is rendered literal. The nurse, violently repelled in the poem when she attempts to touch Hérodiade's hair, is replaced in Beardsley's version by a masked pierrot, limp-wristedly dangling a powder puff from his fingers as he preens Salomé.

⁹ Ellmann, p. 320.

¹⁰ 'Mon cher ami - Le travail est fini - ainsi je pars - Vous m'avez rendu ma visite bien charmante - comme c'est bien de votre habitude - C'est donc un peu ingrat de ma part de ne pas rester pour dénoncer Oscar devant vos disciples demain soir! -

C'est un service que je vous dois - je le sais bien - et cela aurait peut être même ajouté à l'agrément de votre Soirée! -

Les Mardis de Mallarmé sont maintenant historiques - exclusifs - et réservés aux artistes *honnêtes* - L'entrée est un privilège - et une preuve de valeur - Une distinction dont nous sommes fier - Et la Porte du Maître ne doit pas être enfoncée par tout farceurs qui traverse [nt] la Manche pour plus tard s'imposer en détaillant, à bon marché les belles fleurs de conversation et les graves verités que pratique Notre Poete en bel humeur! Adieu...' Trans. by Ellmann, *ibid.*, p. 318. This transcription retains Whistler's eccentric disregard for spelling and accents.

¹¹ *Men and Memories*, I, pp. 94-95; Robert Speaight, *William Rothenstein: The Portrait of an Artist in his Time* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1962), p. 42.

¹² Despite this parodic treatment Beardsley was himself an admirer of Mallarmé, and by 1893 had already decorated his copy of *L'après midi d'un faune* with five small drawings. (Sturgis, *Aubrey Beardsley*, p. 142.)

Anachronism and Bathos

Beardsley is very specific about the furnishings of the room in which the toilette takes place. This is not the theatrical space of 'Enter Herodias', nor the abstract schematic space of the other illustrations. The surfaces of Salomé's dressing table are crowded with vases, bottles, phials, ornaments, boxes and books. These objects, often very small, are all drawn with precise detail. Within the context of Wilde's play, with its large and portentous metaphors and symbols and its Biblical setting, these fragments of domesticity are both bathetic and anachronistic.

The kinds of furnishings and objects which Beardsley places in this room are typical of the kinds of things which would be found in a fashionable Aesthetic house of the 1880s. The dressing table in particular represents furniture designed by E. W. Godwin, who along with Whistler was one of the most influential proponents of the Aesthetic Movement.¹³ Indeed, the furnishings are precisely representative of the interior decoration of Wilde's house at 16 Tite Street, Chelsea, where he lived between his marriage in 1884 and his arrest in 1895. This house was ambitiously - and famously - decorated between 1884 and 1885 by Godwin.¹⁴ Wishing his marital home to reflect the high Aesthetic lifestyle about which he had extensively lectured during his American tour and which he sartorially embodied during the 1880s, Wilde had initially asked Whistler to superintend the decoration. "No, Oscar," Whistler replied, "you have been lecturing to us about the House Beautiful; now is your chance to show us one."¹⁵ At that point Wilde turned to Godwin.¹⁶

One account of Wilde's decorative scheme records that 'Oscar's study at the top of the first flight of stairs facing the drawing-room had an eastern flavour: oriental divans, Japanese prints, Moorish casements, etc., and the shelves contained his valuable books, *éditions de luxe*, and so forth.'¹⁷ The catalogue for the hasty bankruptcy sale of Wilde's possessions which took place on April 24th 1895, just 19 days after Wilde's arrest, lists the following objects from this first floor study: 'Lot 207 - 4 carved wood Moorish window screens'; 'Lot 208 - An antique bronze Persian Mosque lamp'; 'Lot 216 - 2 Chinese enamelled copper jars and lids'; 'Lot 217 - A 4 fold Japanese screen, embroidered in gold'; 'Lot 221 - A Moorish inlaid pearl and

¹³ Kenneth Clark, writing about the second version of this illustration, comments that the dressing table 'represents the revolution in furniture design that had been initiated by Whistler a few years earlier and carried out by E. W. Godwin.' (Clark, p. 86.)

¹⁴ See Ellmann, p. 234 and p. 241.

¹⁵ Quoted in Ellmann, p. 234, from Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson, *A Player Under Three Reigns* (1925), 110.

¹⁶ For a full account of Godwin's scheme of interior decoration for Tite Street, see H. Montgomery Hyde, 'Oscar Wilde and his Architect', *Architectural Review*, 109 (1951), 175-176.

¹⁷ Hesketh Pearson, *The Life of Oscar Wilde* (London: Methuen, 1946), pp. 114-115.

olive wood folding stand, 2 pieces of ditto, and 2 brass plaques.' Under the heading 'China', of the fourteen lots listed, eleven are described as Chinese or Moorish.¹⁸

The Moorish stool, the decorated china and the Godwin dressing table depicted in this illustration represent these kinds of objects. There is no record of Beardsley having visited Wilde at Tite Street, although it is very probable that he had been invited there during the Spring or Summer of 1893 whilst the *Salomé* contract was under negotiation. If not, he may have heard about Wilde's predilection for this kind of Eastern object placed in an Aesthetic setting through a mutual friend like Beerbohm, Ross or Rothenstein, or simply because Wilde's style and taste were extremely well known.

It seems to me that Beardsley's reconstruction of Wilde's taste implies that with *Salomé* Wilde failed to transcend his own historically limited Aesthetic preoccupations. By placing Salomé herself amongst the 'Art Furniture' and Aesthetic bric-a-brac in what is, Beardsley implies, a room in Tite Street, he comments that despite Wilde's claims that his play was 'Byzantine', in fact both stylistically and thematically it was pure 1880s.

Beardsley is also specific about the architectural type of room in which the toilette takes place. At the back of the room curtains part to reveal a window with a typical late nineteenth-century frame and catch. This sash window is small, and the distance between the bottom of the frame and the central bar implies that it is almost square. It is not the window of a grand first floor room, but a small third floor or attic window. With this telling detail Beardsley hints at impoverished suburbia, and implies that the grandeur at which Wilde aimed in his play is not reached.

The possibility that this setting was intended parodically to represent a room in Wilde's own house is given weight by an anecdote related by Rothenstein in his memoirs about an event which had occurred during the Summer of 1893 when he was in Paris, and before he came back to London and shared Beardsley's work table whilst he was working on the *Salomé* illustrations.¹⁹ Rothenstein describes how Whistler, who at that time lived in the glamorous Godwin-designed White House also on Tite Street, 'was contemptuous of Oscar Wilde living in one of a row of houses. In Paris Whistler had described this row, drawing it to show the monotonous repetition of each house, only differentiated by its number, and putting a large 16 on Oscar's house.'²⁰ Given their close friendship and proximity at this moment, it is likely that Rothenstein would have related this anecdote to Beardsley, and that this architectural specificity, in hinting at ordinariness, is another of Beardsley's jokes against Wilde.

¹⁸ *Sale Catalogues of the Libraries of Eminent Persons*, ed. by A. N. L. Munby, 6 vols (London: Mansell with Sotheby Publications, 1971-72), I (1971), pp. 371-388.

¹⁹ *Men and Memories*, I, p. 135.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, I, p. 166.

With his representation of Wilde's Aesthetic taste Beardsley is working within an established tradition and mode of caricature. As I described in chapter II, during the late 1870s and 1880s many caricaturists used Aesthetic furnishings in their cartoons in order to make fun of the affectations embraced by the followers of the movement. A typical image of this period is Alfred Concanen's music cover for *My Aesthetic Love, or Utterly Utter, Consummate Too Too* of 1881 (figure 63). Like 'The Toilette of Salomé' it depicts archetypal Aesthetic props: Godwin furniture, blue and white china, and lilies.²¹ In Concanen's image these props, which by this time immediately signified Aestheticism to the general public, serve to denote affectation and slavish following of fashion. For a contemporary audience, well versed in this kind of cartoon, the setting of 'The Toilette of Salomé', despite its different context, must surely have had similar connotations.

Just as Beerbohm jokingly cast Wilde as an old man in his essay 'A Peep into the Past', and treated the Aesthetic Movement as of recondite historical interest in '1880', Beardsley's depiction of Godwin furniture and lilies, the epitome of Aesthetic 1880s style, seems to me to be a similar joke about how Wilde belonged to an earlier era, and was outmoded in the 1890s. Aestheticism and all its props had become unfashionable by the mid 1880s, yet it seemed that Wilde's Aesthetic doctrines formed in the early 1880s remained largely unchanged. In devising a stage set for *Salomé* furnished with exactly the kinds of things Wilde owned, a mixture of Chinese, Japanese and Moroccan objects, Beardsley is making this same point himself: these furnishings dramatise Wilde's cultural position.

Censorship

The *éditions de luxe* described by Hesketh Pearson have also found their way into Salomé's room. In this first version of the illustration seven books are visible, and it is possible to read the wording of three of them. These are Charles Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1857), Emile Zola's *La Terre* (1888), and a volume of Ibsen.

It has always been assumed that these books are included simply because in the 1890s they were considered to be decadent, risqué or indecent.²² Although this is in part the case, I think that Beardsley's joke is subtler than this. Baudelaire, Zola and Ibsen are such obvious choices of shocking nineteenth-century authors that they seem more likely to frame a joke about the predictability of Wilde's taste than Beardsley's showing off his own familiarity with decadent literature. Not only do we know from Beardsley's correspondence and from anecdotes that by 1893 he had a wide and

²¹ For material on popular culture and on satire surrounding the Aesthetic Movement I am indebted to Lambourne, *The Aesthetic Movement*.

²² Heyd, p. 132; Beckson, 'The Artist as Transcendental Phallus', p. 215; Snodgrass, *Aubrey Beardsley*, p. 65.

sophisticated literary knowledge, but also these books look tame in comparison with the far more alarming and *recherché* books he introduces into the second version of 'The Toilette of Salomé'.²³ These books, then, allow Beardsley to reiterate his point about Wilde's specious cultural pretensions.

Moreover, with the choice of these books Beardsley makes a very specific sally against Wilde, as two of these authors were famously subjected to censorship, and there were many calls in the early 1890s for the same fate to befall the third. On the publication of *Les Fleurs du Mal* in 1857 Baudelaire was convicted and fined 300 francs.²⁴ In October 1888 Henry Vizetelly, the English publisher of Zola's novels, was convicted for printing an English translation of *La Terre*.²⁵ A London performance of Ibsen's 1881 play *Ghosts* in March 1891 had resulted in public outrage and hundreds of articles and reviews, mostly calling for the censorship of the play.²⁶ Again, the joke is about the Lord Chamberlain's censorship of the theatrical production of *Salomé* in 1892, and Wilde's sensitivity on the subject. As self-appointed director of the play, Beardsley takes every opportunity to remind Wilde and others of this.

Undercutting

In the centre of this Aesthetic arrangement is Salomé herself. In the context of the other illustrations, in which she appears in active and aggressive attitudes, her sitting, bowed-head pose here is anomalous. Yet despite this anomaly, and the illustration's apparent irrelevance to the play, 'The Toilette of Salomé' carries on an established artistic tradition of the toilette as a highly charged psychological and erotic moment. In depicting a biblical anti-heroine in an intimate domestic environment, Beardsley is using a theme common to many nineteenth-century artists, and one favoured by artists of the Aesthetic Movement. This theme was employed particularly by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, who was a strong influence on Beardsley. Around two years before the *Salomé* commission Beardsley had been to Frederick Leyland's house to see Whistler's Peacock room and Leyland's painting collection. The visit is enthusiastically recorded in a letter to Beardsley's old school friend G. F. Scotson-Clark in July 1891 ('his collection is GLORIOUS!'), in which the Rossetti paintings

²³ In his memoirs Rothenstein records that in 1893 Beardsley 'knew his Balzac from cover to cover, and [had] explored the courts and alleys of French and English seventeenth and eighteenth century literature.' (*Men and Memories*, I, p. 136.)

²⁴ Sturgis, *Passionate Attitudes*, p. 21.

²⁵ Karl Beckson, *London in the 1890s: A Cultural History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992), pp. 302-303.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 164-165. Beardsley certainly knew about *Ghosts*, as he drew an illustration of Act 1 of the play in a scrapbook, a drawing which Reade dates as c.1890, but which I think is more likely to have been made in 1891 at the time of the play's performance and related publicity. (Reade, *Beardsley*, p. 312, n. 18.)

he saw there are listed.²⁷ Amongst the eleven paintings in the list are 'Veronica Veronese' (1872) and 'Lady Lilith' (1868). Both these paintings use high literary/mythological subjects as ways of presenting psychological studies, and in order to lend greater significance to an intimate and - at least for the viewer - potentially erotically charged activity: brushing hair, or playing a lute.

Beardsley does not only refer to Rossettian femmes-fatales here, but to a far older convention of representations of female nudes. Salomé's hand shields her sex, an attitude famously represented in Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* (1484-90), Giorgione's *Sleeping Venus* (c.1505-10) and Titian's *Venus of Urbino* (c.1538). Edouard Manet's infamous *Olympia* (1865) was based on Titian's painting, yet its contemporary setting made it obscene to a conservative audience. In 'The Toilette of Salomé' not only does Beardsley introduce a nearly contemporary setting, but also a parodic and obscene element. Salomé's wrist does not shield her sex modestly, but bends sharply down between her thighs, suggesting masturbation. Her eyes are closed and her lips slightly parted in erotic reverie. Beardsley parodically transforms the psychological self-absorption of the toilette and its erotic overtones, so readily understandable to a contemporary audience, into the physical self-absorption of auto-eroticism, thus adding another comedic layer to the image.

Moreover, one aspect of popular music-hall entertainment in the early 1890s was the 'Living Picture', a slightly risqué theatrical attraction in which *tableaux* of well-known paintings and mildly erotic scenes were posed.²⁸ It is possible, given Beardsley's references to music hall dancers in the border design, 'The Black Cape' and 'The Stomach Dance' that the composition of 'The Toilette of Salomé' is based on this kind of *tableau*.

Caricature

The pointed beard and waxed moustaches of the Pierrot barber - the only distinguishing features which emerge from the masked face - suggest to me that this might be a caricature of Lane (figure 64). Beardsley's letter to Lane in Paris earlier in the Autumn includes a caricature drawing of him as a 'gay & garish Parisian' (figure 65), in which his beard and moustaches are rendered in the same manner. Similarly, at around this time Beerbohm drew a caricature of Lane which emphasises his small pointed beard and long moustaches (figure 66). A contemporary account of Lane's appearance records 'a little dapper man ... well groomed, well dressed. His hair, parted and brushed with scrupulous care, was something between auburn and sandy.

²⁷ *The Letters of Aubrey Beardsley*, p. 19.

²⁸ For example in 1894 a *tableau* known as 'The Moorish Bath' excited comment. Stokes, p. 77.

His beard was trimmed to a point. His eyes were big, bluish, and decidedly expressive.’²⁹

This vignette is perhaps symbolic of the entire publishing venture. Lane is an appropriate figure to groom Salomé before her performance, as he was, of course, attentively grooming *Salomé* for its publication at the time. That Salomé herself is masturbating as he grooms adds to the joke, as her behaviour perhaps alludes to the private erotic jokes in the sequence of illustrations. If we accept that Beardsley intended this parallel, then it may be reasonable to assume that the barber’s implied complicity with Salomé’s behaviour suggests that Lane was at least partly complicit in the publication of various erotic elements in the *Salomé* illustrations.

Degeneracy

Salomé has three young attendants. The sitting boy is naked but for Moorish slippers and an arm band with the Whistlerian half-moon decoration, a design which serves as a sort of court livery throughout the illustrations. With this arm band Beardsley perhaps refers to the boy’s mourning for Narraboth, the young Syrian captain who commits suicide, and therefore implies a homosexual attachment.

Like Salomé, the boy is engaged in auto-eroticism. Both hands are between his thighs, and his penis is just visible between his wrists. Masturbation was one of the great taboos of nineteenth-century theories of sexuality. Not only was it considered to cause the loss both of physical and mental health, it was also believed to be practised by a recognisable physical type. The specialist in diseases of the urinary and genital systems William Acton, in his book *The Function and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs*, which went through six editions between 1857 and 1875, treats any loss of semen, even through ‘normal’ intercourse, as potentially hazardous to health, and the wasteful habit of masturbation as both physically and morally detrimental. For the benefit of the anxious parent, he sketches the physical and mental type most prone to this disorder: ‘it is not the strong, athletic boy, fond of healthy exercise, who thus early shows marks of sexual desires - it is your puny exotic, whose intellectual education has been cared for at the expense of his physical development.’³⁰ A more detailed description of this degenerate type is offered by Acton in a quotation from Claude-François Lallemand’s *Les pertes séminales involontaires* (three volumes, 1836-42): ‘However young the children may be, they become thin, pale and irritable, and their features assume a haggard appearance. We notice the sunken eye, the long, cadaverous-looking countenance, the downcast look

²⁹ J. Lewis May, *The Path Through the Wood* (New York: Dial, 1931), p. 139.

³⁰ Quoted in Wayland Young, *Eros Denied: Sex in Western Society* (New York: Grove Press, 1964), p. 235.

which seems to arise from a consciousness in the boy that his habits are suspected, and, at a later period, from the ascertained fact that his virility is lost.’³¹ This point is reiterated by Nicholas Francis Cooke in a medical work aimed at a wide audience, *Satan in Society* (1871). Here the type is described thus: ‘the onanist presents an aspect of languor, weakness, and thinness. The countenance is pale, sunken, flabby, often leaden, or more or less livid, with a dark circle around the sunken eyes, which are dull, and lowered or averted. A sad, shameful, spiritless physiognomy.’ Cooke also describes a ‘great weakness in the back.’³²

Beardsley presents the page in this illustration as the very type of the ‘puny exotic’: dark, thin, bent-backed and elongated, with heavy, sunken eyes under which are dark circles. Moreover, his proximity to the ‘immoral’ books on the shelf adds to his characterisation as a congenital self-abuser, as the act of reading itself was thought likely to lead to masturbation: ‘his reading should be of a nature calculated not to tax the strength, and strict injunctions should be given to abstain from the perusal of any work containing allusion to the subject of his complaint, or any work which would be likely to produce erotic ideas.’³³ In stressing the degeneracy of the attendant through visual clues which would have been readily understood by a late nineteenth-century audience, Beardsley is perhaps making an allusion to the nature of *Salomé*, the French edition of which was attacked by critics specifically for its degeneracy. This is most clearly articulated in an unsigned review in the *Pall Mall Gazette*: ‘[*Salomé*] is the daughter of too many fathers. She is a victim of heredity. Her bones want strength, her flesh wants vitality, her blood is polluted. There is no pulse of passion in her.’³⁴

The position of the standing girl’s hand also suggests masturbation. Playing an instrument serves as a metaphor for this activity, as in period slang to practice the ‘five finger exercise’ was to masturbate.³⁵ The girl’s thick hair, downcast eyes, full mouth and dreamy expression suggest the female type favoured by Rossetti.³⁶ A comic poem by Owen Seaman in response to a similar facial type represented in Beardsley’s 1894 poster design for John Todhunter’s play *A Comedy of Sighs* expresses a contemporary reaction against the perceived foreign quality of this physiognomy: ‘Your Japanee-Rossetti girl / Is not a thing to be desired’.³⁷

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 236.

³² A Physician [Nicholas Francis Cooke], *Satan in Society* (Cincinnati and New York: [n. pub.], 1871), p. 99.

³³ Young, p. 236.

³⁴ Anon., *Pall Mall Gazette*, February 27 1893, p. 3.

³⁵ Green, p. 238, gives similar slang expressions.

³⁶ Beardsley’s parodies of the Pre-Raphaelite type is discussed in John Dixon Hunt, *The Pre-Raphaelite Imagination 1848-1900* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968), pp. 203-209.

³⁷ Owen Seaman, ‘Ars Postera’, *Punch*, 21 April 1894, p. 189. This poem was also published in 1896 in Seaman’s collection *The Battle of the Bays*. See Stephen Calloway and Susan Owens, ‘A “Lost” Beardsley Drawing Rediscovered’, *Apollo*, 153 (2001), 49-54.

Visual Puns

There are numerous instances in 'The Toilette of Salomé' in which lines are interrupted or penetrated by pointed shapes, a formal erotic narrative which Beardsley also exploits in 'The Woman in the Moon'. The spout of the young attendant's coffee pot is phallic, and penetrates the line at the back of Salomé's gown, pointing directly at her breast. The elliptical shelf which protrudes from the Godwin dressing table, upon which sits the grotesque model of a foetus, points directly and threateningly at the boy's genitals. This same shelf just pierces the line of Salomé's gown. The longest line of Salomé's gown at the front sweeps down and intersects with two front legs of the dressing table before it disappears behind the bass viol, pointing towards the two attendants on the left. Another line from her gown sweeps the other way, pointing at the attendant on the right.

The standing boy's slightly hermaphroditic chest is magnified on the left by the shape of Salomé's breasts, which in turn are magnified grotesquely on the left again by the edges of the pierrot's cape which form the contours of gigantic breasts.

These pointed shapes which are directed menacingly towards breasts or genitals, and the tangled or snaking lines which reach out from Salomé's gown in each direction to point to her attendants, all contribute to a narrative of sexual danger and influence. Despite the linear pallor of Salomé's appearance in this illustration, in comparison with the flat dark areas of hair, mask or clothes which distinguish the other characters, she is the focal point of the image, and attracts all these visual metaphors for penetration: the slender spout of the young boy's coffee pot, the pierrot barber's finger in her hair, and his pointed beard, the dressing table's shelf, and the girl's bow, which provides an amplified visual echo for the sitting boy's penis. With these visual metaphors, despite the satirical content of the image, Beardsley comes closest to faithfully illustrating the story of Salomé's erotic influence.

Section xi

'The Toilette of Salomé' (Second Version) (figure 67)

When the first version of 'The Toilette of Salomé' was withdrawn by Lane, Beardsley provided a replacement illustration. This censorship would have given Beardsley a free hand to choose another subject for the replacement image, and yet he produced another toilette scene, an act which suggests that the choice of subject was not gratuitous, but a significant component of his satirical scheme.

In this section I will discuss how Beardsley repeated and refined some of the jokes of the first version in this image, and suggest that the second version includes a satirical commentary on the censorship of the first.

Anachronism

In this illustration Salomé, now clothed in a dress that fills a large proportion of the available space, sits on a chair at a dressing table. At her side stands a masked barber in a pierrot costume. This second version, with its bold contrasts between large black and white planes and focus on one large central figure, is much closer stylistically to the other *Salomé* illustrations than the first version of the image, with its clutter of small objects, relatively large cast of characters, and linear intricacy. The floor space in the second version is completely blank, and the furnishings that are depicted are spare, restrained and rectilinear.

However, Beardsley is still specific about this space as a room, whilst most of the other illustrations are set in abstract space. The ebonised dressing table with long slender legs and thin shelves at which Salomé sits is, as in the first version of the image, based on a Godwin design. A black skirting board marks the parameter of the floor space. To the left of Salomé's head, where, in the light of the other illustrations, we might expect to find blank space or a decorative element, is a window with curtains and a Venetian blind. The implied scale of this room again marks it out as a domestic space, a bedroom or a dressing room. Some of the small objects have also been transferred over from the dressing table of the first version: on the bottom shelf of this dressing table are five books. On the next shelf up, from left to right, is a perfume bottle of Moorish design; a small cylindrical pot with the same pattern; two small squareish boxes; a fan box, also with the same pattern; and a small cut glass bottle with a blank label. On the top shelf, from left to right, are a large pair of scissors; a white powder box with everted feet, with a powder puff balanced in it; a small slender cylindrical object which might be some sort of cosmetic; a small white bottle with a black neck, white stopper and black-edged label; a large cylindrical pot with the same sort of pattern as the small one below, which might be used to store

powder; and a small pair of scissors. On the far top shelf of the dressing table is a mounted piece of coral, of the kind often used for holding rings.

These objects are subtly different to those depicted in the first version of the image; in the first, the kinds of object are more heterogeneous: vases, bottles, pots too large to contain cosmetics and tiny containers too small to contain perfume. In the second version the clutter is reduced, the objects are more neatly laid out, and they are individually identifiable. Where in the first version the objects seem to me to function primarily as an undifferentiated mass of Aesthetic signifiers, in this image they seem to serve a more specifically domestic, cosmetic function, and demand to be interpreted as separate objects. The Moorish perfume container and the fan on the middle shelf of the dressing table are distinctly Aesthetic objects. The two smallest bottles resemble the kind in which laudanum or chloral were supplied. The narrative of degeneration told in the first version by the images of sexual deviancy and by the physically deviant type is telescoped here into an implication of drug addiction, which in the late nineteenth century was widespread, associated with degeneracy, and the cause of serious concern amongst physicians.

The blind covers the window, so we can no longer detect the age or status of the room from the kind of window frame depicted, as we could in the first version. It is possible that Beardsley was forbidden by Lane to include this detail in the replacement illustration, so in response he censored the window by covering it with a blind, and, tantalisingly, partly covered it with half open curtains. Yet the kind of window covering is as eloquent about the kind of room this is as the frame in the previous version. The Venetian blind began to be popular in the 1880s, and whilst it was neither particularly smart nor *déclassé*, for Beardsley it had one important quality: the slats of the blind would gather in a stack on the window sill if the window were not sufficiently tall to accommodate the entire length of the blind. This is the case here; there are as many slats folded on the sill as are visible hanging in front of the window, so we know that this is not a tall window, but, as before, a third floor or attic window. Beardsley ingeniously makes the same point as he does in the first version of the image about the modesty and ordinariness of the room in which the toilette takes place: that in *Salomé* impoverished vulgarity masquerades as magisterial grandeur.

Similarly, although the Aesthetic lilies have vanished, the presence of the Godwin dressing table sets this room firmly in the Aesthetic 1880s. The first version of 'The Toilette of Salomé' used the idiom of 1880s caricature prints in its satirical portrait of a cluttered Aesthetic interior; the second version abandons this idiom and telescopes the satirical implications to one piece of furniture. The implication is the same as before, that since Beardsley considered Wilde's play to be hopelessly

marooned in the English 1880s, rather than Ancient Judæa, then he would illustrate it in kind.

Another reference to Wilde's preoccupations is made by the black skirting board. One of Wilde's favourite books was Huysmans's *A rebours*, a novel which catalogues decadent practices, texts and images, and which was considered at the time to be grotesquely depraved, falling, as Huysmans himself was to write many years later, 'like a meteorite into the literary fairground.'¹ Huysmans's description in *A rebours* of Gustave Moreau's drawings of Salomé dancing before Herod was amongst the works which initially suggested the project of *Salomé* to Wilde. Beardsley also knew the book, which describes at length the decorative scheme implemented by the protagonist Duc Jean Floressas des Esseintes in his secluded house at Fontenay. After having his walls painted 'that most morbid and irritating of colours, with its acid glow and unnatural splendour - orange', des Esseintes has the 'mouldings and the tall plinths lacquered a deep indigo.'² It seems to me that Beardsley's seemingly gratuitous inclusion of a black skirting board in this room is a direct reference to this famous literary decorative scheme.³ In placing Salomé in a room which modestly imitates that described by Huysmans, Beardsley implies that Wilde's mental picture of the play was informed by *A rebours*, and thus that Wilde sought to emulate Huysmans.

Salomé's nudity of the first version is covered here by elaborate underclothes. She wears a black corset - the four vertical white lines testify to its boned structure, as does the white line which delineates the bust line - and a hooped petticoat. Around her shoulders she wears a long black and white gown. The combination of the straight, narrow line of the corset and the petticoat covered with tiers of material, as well as the low *décolletage*, reveal this to be women's costume not, as Reade and Clark both suggest, of the late nineteenth century, but of the 1770s or 80s.⁴ In fact MacFall, in his 1928 biography of Beardsley, calls this second version *Georgian Toilette*, although whether this name was ever used by Beardsley or Lane is not made clear.⁵ This continues the eighteenth-century theme suggested by the dates of two of the books on Salomé's shelves, by the title of Verlaine's poems and by the Watteauesque pierrot figure. This theme serves to deride Wilde's own anachronistic Aesthetic version of ancient Judæa, especially in the light of his sustained criticism of

¹ Quoted from Robert Baldick's introduction to Huysmans, *Against Nature*, p. 10.

² 'cette couleur irritante et malade, aux splendeurs fictives, aux fièvres acides: orange'; 'il fit, peindre les baguettes et les hautes plinthes en un indigo foncé, en un indigo laqué.' *Ibid.*, p. 30.

³ Beardsley himself had adopted this decorative scheme for his own house in Cambridge Street, Pimlico for its decadent associations.

⁴ Reade, *Beardsley*, p. 336; Clark, p. 86. See C. Willett and Phillis Cunnington, *The History of Underclothes* (London: Michael Joseph, 1951), and Laver, *A Concise History of Costume*, pp. 127-153.

⁵ MacFall, p. 51.

anachronistic theatrical costume 'The Truth of Masks'. In this essay Wilde singles out eighteenth-century costume for particular criticism, asserting that 'the affected style of dress in the last century was the natural characteristic of a society of affected manners and affected conversation'.⁶ Beardsley's inclusion of eighteenth-century costume here surely implies that Wilde's play is a work of 'affected' language. The issue at stake is the hypocrisy of Wilde's theatrical pretensions, which the specificity of Salomé's costume is intended to debunk.

Censorship, Homosexuality, Imprisonment and Expatriation

The necessity of replacing the first version of the illustration also provided Beardsley with the opportunity to revise his choice of books. Five books appear in the second version of 'The Toilette of Salomé', and their titles and authors are written with far greater clarity and precision than those in the first version; all five are readable. Again in this second version Beardsley has refined and reduced the Aesthetic shrapnel of the first version to a few clearly defined elements which demand to be interpreted individually. The books are Zola's *Nana*, Paul Verlaine's *Les Fêtes Galantes*, a volume of the Marquis de Sade, l'Abbé Prévost's *Manon Lescaut* and Apuleius's *The Golden Ass*.

The inclusion of a Zola novel again suggests a joke about censorship because of Vizetelly's criminal conviction. Yet here it has been changed from *La Terre* to the more scurrilous novel *Nana* (1880). The protagonist of the novel, Nana, leads a depraved life of squalor and vice, taking many lovers. Despite her seduction of aristocratic men, she is drawn to, and has many affairs with, rough low life men, partly, it is implied, through her own native vulgarity. I think it just possible that in changing the Zola novel from *La Terre* to *Nana* Beardsley may have intended to sharpen the satirical edge by drawing attention to a connection between Nana and Wilde. Wilde's link with the aristocratic Douglas and his frequent liaisons with working class rent boys, as well as the vulgarity which Beerbohm had divined in Wilde's character, all invite comparison with Nana.⁷

Moreover, Beerbohm's essay on Wilde which was published in the Spring of 1893 casts further light on Beardsley's inclusion of a Zola novel in both versions of the image. In this essay Beerbohm quotes Wilde's opinion of Zola's working methods: 'Do you know, whenever that man writes a book he always takes his subjects directly from life. If he is going to write about dreadful people in hovels he

⁶ *Intentions*, pp. 250-51.

⁷ Beerbohm remarks upon these same traits in a letter to Ross of 1893: 'Poor Oscar! I saw him the other day, from a cab walking with Bosie and some other members of the Extreme Left. He looked like one whose soul has swooned in sin and revived vulgar. How fearful it is for a poet to go to bed and find himself infamous.' Quoted in Ellmann, p. 371.

goes and lives in a hovel himself for months in case he shouldn't be accurate. It is strange. Take me for example. I have conceived the idea for the most exquisite tale that was ever written. The period is the eighteenth century. It would require a morning's reading at the British Museum.'⁸ Given that the publication of this article coincided with the publication of the French edition of *Salomé*, it is very likely that Beerbohm and Beardsley would privately have made the connection between Wilde's attitude and the nature of his new play, which, as pointed out by most of his critics, was unoriginal and brazenly relied for style and treatment on the works of other contemporary authors. In the light of this, Zola's painstakingly researched book on *Salomé's* shelf reproaches Wilde for the slightness of his knowledge of the period about which he writes.

Paul Verlaine was a key figure in the French Decadent movement. He caused a scandal in the literary establishment when in 1872 he abandoned his wife and child to live with his young protégé Arthur Rimbaud. This homosexual scandal acquired a new dimension when during an argument in 1873 Verlaine shot Rimbaud in the wrist, and was subsequently imprisoned for two years.⁹ Beardsley's inclusion of Verlaine's 1869 collection of poems *Les Fêtes Galantes* can be interpreted as a covert remark (in the light of subsequent events, a horribly prophetic one) on the potential seedy and tragic consequences of a homosexual scandal. Significantly, Beerbohm turns the possibility of Wilde's arrest on the grounds of a homosexual scandal into a joke in a letter to Reggie Turner of August 12th 1894, when he remarks: 'Oscar has at length been arrested for certain kinds of crime. He was taken in the Café Royal (lower room). Bosie escaped, being an excellent runner, but Oscar was less nimble.'¹⁰

Literary suppression, deviant sexuality and imprisonment are also conveyed by the next book on the shelf. The works of the Marquis de Sade were suppressed in the late nineteenth century on the grounds that they were compulsively vicious, pornographic and blasphemous.¹¹ At this date de Sade's name was sufficiently infamous to make the point, and few of his books would have been widely known by their titles, yet nonetheless amongst his few famous works was one principally devoted to homosexuality, *Les Cent Vingt Journées de Sodome*, which was written during his imprisonment.

The scandal conveyed by the references to Verlaine and to de Sade is echoed by *Manon Lescaut*. L'Abbé Prévost wrote his first novel *Les Mémoires et Aventures*

⁸ Beerbohm, 'Oscar Wilde', p. 289.

⁹ Sturgis, *Passionate Attitudes*, p. 30.

¹⁰ *Letters to Reggie Turner*, p. 97. The editor notes that this joke probably referred to a police raid on a club at 46 Fitzroy Street reported on the date of the letter, which resulted in the arrest of eighteen men, including two in female dress.

¹¹ Leonard Smithers occasionally included works by de Sade in his lists. Nelson, *Publisher to the Decadents*, p. 50 and p. 317.

d'un Homme de Qualité qui s'est retiré du Monde (1731), volume seven of which was the story of Des Grieux and Manon Lescaut, in a monastery, and because of the immorality of the work, under a pseudonym. However, the author's identity was soon discovered, and he was forced to leave the monastery and to seek refuge in England.¹² This expatriation perhaps also refers to Wilde's well-publicised threat, made in an interview in the *Pall Mall Budget* in which he anticipated the censorship of *Salomé* from the stage, to leave England take up French citizenship if this occurred: 'I will not consent to call myself a citizen of a country that shows such narrowness in artistic judgement.'¹³ Wilde's caricaturists responded to this, and in *Punch* on July 9th 1892 Partridge played on the military service to which Wilde would be subjected if he carried this threat out by caricaturing him in French military uniform.

Beardsley's inclusion of *The Golden Ass* amongst this series of books has both literary and proverbial significance. In literary terms, Apuleius was notorious for the extraordinary flamboyance of his Latin. In the introduction to his own translation of *The Golden Ass*, Robert Graves has this to say about Apuleius's literary style: 'William Adlington, in whose vigorous early-Elizabethan translation the book is still best known, remarks in his introduction that Apuleius wrote "in so dark and high a style, in so strange and absurd words and in such new invented phrases, as he seemed rather to set it forth to show his magnificent prose than to participate his doings to others.'"¹⁴ It seems to me to be highly likely that an oblique comparison with Wilde's own mannered style is being made here.

I also think it significant that on the spine of this book only the title and not the author is written, and it seems to me that Beardsley's primary reference is to the ass in the title. Like the owl which Beardsley associates with Wilde in 'Enter Herodias', the ass has certain specific proverbial qualities. Since ancient times the ass has been the type of clumsiness, ignorance and stupidity. However, like the owl, it has also always carried implications of an arrogant display of spurious wisdom, which it is always fated to betray when it 'speaks'. The origin of this characterisation is found in classical myth. Lemprière in his *Classical Dictionary* relates how 'Midas had the imprudence to support that Pan was superior to Apollo in singing and playing upon the flute, for which rash opinion the offended god changed his ears into those of an ass, to show his ignorance and stupidity.' This myth was reworked into a proverb, which Brewer lists in his *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* as 'the ass waggeth his ears.' 'This proverb', Brewer writes, 'is applied to those who lack learning, and yet

¹² Translator's introduction to L'Abbé Prévost, *Manon Lescaut*, trans. by L. W. Tancock (London: Penguin Books, 1949), pp. 7-10.

¹³ Quoted in Ellmann, p. 352.

¹⁴ Lucius Apuleius, *The Transformations of Lucius, otherwise known as The Golden Ass*, trans. by Robert Graves (London: Penguin Books, 1950), p. 9.

talk as if they were very wise; men wise in their own conceit. The ass, proverbial for having no “taste for music,” will nevertheless wag its ears at a “concord of sweet sounds,” just as if it could well appreciate it.’ A development of this fable, ‘an ass in a lion’s skin’, is described by Brewer as ‘a coward who hectors, a fool that apes the wise man. The allusion is to the fable of an ass that put on a lion’s hide, but was betrayed when he began to bray.’ This connotation of the ass was not an archaic reference, but current in the 1890s; on Wilde’s arrest in 1895 a printed street ballad, *Oh Oscar Wilde, We Never Thought That You Was Built That Way*, includes the lines: ‘For people who we think are 18 carat turn out brass, / And what we thought a Lion’s roar’s the braying of [an] ass’.¹⁵ If Beardsley intended to allude to the proverbial qualities of the ass, then his implication is very similar to that which he makes with the owl in ‘Enter Herodias’: Wilde’s talent for self-advertisement overreaches his talent for writing; in full hubristic spate, the self-proclaimed literary lion betrays his underlying asinine qualities. Again, with the musical implications of both the proverbs and of the classical myth, Wilde’s frequent protestations of the lyrical qualities of his play are held up for ridicule, as they were by his caricature as Mercury in ‘Enter Herodias’.

Caricature

I identified the masked barber in the first version of ‘The Toilette of Salomé’ as a caricature of Lane. I think that Beardsley develops this joke in the second version of the image; since Lane had insisted upon the censorship of the first version of ‘The Toilette of Salomé’, I think that, as a rebuke to him, in the second version Beardsley censored Lane from the illustration, and substituted a caricature of Lane’s business partner Mathews (figure 68). Beardsley was to go on to make what has always been considered to be a caricature of Mathews in the Spring of the following year, as the pierrot shopkeeper for the prospectus for the *Yellow Book* (figure 69), a figure closely resembling the pierrot barber here.

In the previous section I proposed that the rejected first version of ‘The Toilette of Salomé’ does far more than tell the erotic narrative which has always been considered to be its only story. This is borne out by the published second version of the image which, as I have argued, preserves the complex jokes which I identified in the first version, and which I believe to be the underlying subject of both images. The

¹⁵ Reproduced in facsimile in Stokes, p. 4.

conventionally erotic or indecent elements are easily identified and censored, yet the real satire remains.

Section xii

The Dancer's Reward (figure 70)

'The Dancer's Reward' illustrates one of the strongest dramatic climaxes of the *Salomé* story, the moment at which Salomé receives the head of Iokanaan. Beardsley depicts the very moment of presentation, the executioner's arm stretching up from the cistern below the stage where in Wilde's version of the story the beheading takes place, and Salomé grasping eagerly at the head.

The illustration is placed some pages before the beheading of Iokanaan occurs in the play. It faces an exchange between Herod and Salomé in which Salomé repeatedly asks for the head of Iokanaan and Herod attempts tactics of refusal. In its placing, then, the image can be seen to prefigure the text, derailing its chronology and casting a shadow of inevitable outcome over the complex negotiations of Wilde's dialogue. This illusion of the illustration's pre-emptive strength, however, is provisional in the face of *Salomé's* legendary status as a story.

The stage direction relating to this image occurs on page 64, opposite the illustration following 'The Dancer's Reward', 'The Climax'. It reads: 'A huge black arm, the arm of the Executioner, comes forth from the cistern, bearing on a silver shield the head of Iokanaan. Salomé seizes it. Herod hides his face with his cloak. Herodias smiles and fans herself. The Nazarenes fall on their knees and begin to pray.' Salomé then speaks a long monologue, beginning: 'Ah! thou wouldst not suffer me to kiss thy mouth, Iokanaan. Well! I will kiss it now...'¹

'The Dancer's Reward' illustrates Wilde's stage direction with great precision. Salomé is shown bending towards Iokanaan's head and seizing it. The head lies on a surface which is shaped, as specified in Wilde's stage direction, like a shield, coming to a point on the left hand side. The shield is supported by a black arm which comes up from the bottom of the image, below floor level, as though the executioner is below the level of the stage in the cistern which Wilde describes. This close adherence to the details of Wilde's direction is unusual for Beardsley, and 'The Dancer's Reward' is the first of the *Salomé* sequence to behave in a manner seemingly faithful to the text without hosting some irrelevant or irreverent component of startling magnitude - Wilde's own face anthropomorphically transformed into the moon, a skirt decorated with ostentatiously Whistlerian patterns, or a grotesque and carnivalesque extra. The parodic alternative narratives are subdued in 'The Dancer's Reward', although they are not excluded altogether.

¹ *Complete Works*, p. 573.

Salomé seizes the head by its forelock with her right hand, whilst the fingers of her left hand dabble in the blood which lies on the surface of the shield, and which pours thickly over the side. This is her prize, what Jeffrey Wallen terms her 'Aesthetic and erotic object'² Salomé's and Iokanaan's expressions mirror one another, and Beardsley gives them effectively the same features and the same expressions. Where Iokanaan's mouth is open in death, Salomé's is open in amazed revelation and avid desire; where Iokanaan frowns in pain, Salomé arches her brows in astonishment. Where Iokanaan's long, serpentine locks of hair mingle with the blood pouring from his neck, from the front of Salomé's hair a little cascade of dots, like powder, fall.

Formally the illustration is remarkable for its elongation and vertical thrust. Given the proportion of her arms and the shape of her back as she bends forward, Salomé's body, which stretches right up to the top framing line of the image, should end with her feet at about the point of the executioner's elbow, yet it stretches down beyond the bottom edge of the drawing. Similarly, the executioner's 'huge black arm' is impossibly long. The grammar of the body's proportions is made secondary to Beardsley's overall decorative scheme, and these elongations are used to increase the dramatic effect. Salomé fills the space and looms menacingly over her prize. The executioner's arm is decontextualised, becoming a grotesque stalk, the severed head its hideous flower.

Echoing Salomé's voracious open mouth her cape gapes widely open between her arms, as though to engulf Iokanaan's head, emphasising the theme of consumption upon which Wilde's text plays. The vaginal symbolism of the gaping cloak and the strong phallic symbolism of the executioner's arm supporting Iokanaan's head dramatise Salomé's acquisition of the head as a sexual consummation.

The robe Salomé wears has both funereal and ecclesiastical connotations. The funereal blackness relates to Iokanaan's death and prefigures Salomé's own. The suggestion that this is an ecclesiastical vestment - the white lengths of material around Salomé's neck resemble a priest's stole - presents the scene as a blasphemous version of the communion service: Salomé is a priest accepting an offering of the body and the blood of Iokanaan. The cannibalistic similes which Salomé uses in talking of her sexual desire - 'I will bite [thy mouth] with my teeth as one bites a ripe fruit'³ - are presented by Beardsley in terms of the Christian symbolism of bread and wine as the body and blood of Christ; the head of Iokanaan is elevated by the executioner's arm like the host in Holy Communion. This suggestion is another instance of the

² Jeffrey Wallen, 'Illustrating Salomé: Perverting the Text?', *Word & Image*, 8 (1992), p. 130.

³ *Complete Works*, p. 573.

references to the Christian story which Beardsley weaves into the *Salomé* illustrations. Beardsley reworks Wilde's themes of sexual desire and sacrifice into a quasi-Christian ritual.

Anachronism

Yet despite the powerful layers of symbolism - sexual, religious, cannibalistic - at work here, and the high dramatic pitch of the image, it still hosts subtly satiric elements which work to debunk Wilde's authority.

As I have said, the design is dominated by the severe drapery of Salomé's robe. As well as having ecclesiastical connotations, her robe also resembles Ancient Greek costume. The brooch which fastens her long tunic at the neck is an accurate representation of the fastenings of Greek dress. According to one costume historian, 'in Homer the brooch is almost invariably mentioned as an essential detail of female costume, and the garments described are of a simple character, and such that they can be spread out and used for other purposes.'⁴ Salomé's costume is probably based both on Beardsley's study of Attic red and black figure vases in the British Museum, and on an illustrated book by the classics scholar Jane Harrison and the art critic D. S. MacColl, *Greek Vase Painting*. Although the publication date of this book is 1894, it was published by Fisher Unwin, a publisher for whom Beardsley was working in 1893, when the book would have been in preparation.⁵ Ross, in his biography of Beardsley, cites a work by D. S. MacColl, presumably *Greek Vase Painting*, as a major source of Beardsley's at this time: 'Before commencing *Salomé* [an event] contributed to give Beardsley a fresh impetus and stimulate his method of expression: a series of visits to the collection of Greek vases in the British Museum (prompted by an essay of Mr D. S. McColl [*sic.*] [...]) Impressionable at all times to novel sensations, his artistic perceptions vibrated with a new and inspired enthusiasm. Critical appreciation under his pen meant creation. From the Greek vase painting he learned that drapery can be represented effectually with a few lines, disposed with economy, not by a number of unfinished scratches and superfluous shading.'⁶

I do not mean to suggest that Salomé's costume functions solely for comic effect, since it so obviously serves a dramatic end, as well as being an instance of Beardsley's use of new visual influences. Yet for one thing it is a bold anachronism in the context of Wilde's *Salomé*, and so conforms to conventional satirical

⁴ Ethel B. Abrahams, *Greek Dress: A Study of the Costumes Worn in Ancient Greece, from Pre-Hellenic Times to the Hellenistic Age* (London: John Murray, 1908), p. 3.

⁵ Calloway, *Aubrey Beardsley*, pp. 52-53. The stamped cover design to *Greek Vase Paintings* has no attribution, and it is not mentioned anywhere either in the primary or the secondary literature. David Colvin has suggested in a private conversation that it is possibly a design by Beardsley himself.

⁶ Ross, p. 46. Beardsley had first met MacColl through Robert Ross in December 1892 (Weintraub (1967), pp. 42-44), and MacColl had been impressed by Beardsley's work.

methodology. It also inevitably calls to mind Wilde's championing of Greek dress as a model for modern dress reform, expounded most fully in his article 'Woman's Dress' of 1884, as discussed above in the section on 'The Black Cape'. Especially in the light of the play on modern fashionable dress in that illustration, Salomé's dress here may be a literal rendition of Wilde's frequently expressed admiration for the graceful hang and folds made by Greek dress suspended from the shoulders ('it is from the shoulders, and from the shoulders only, that all garments should be hung'⁷), the joke being that Beardsley solemnly takes Wilde at his word in an inappropriate context.

Visual Jokes, Interruption and Incongruity

A visual joke is made in the hang of Salomé's cape on the left hand side which, like the hanging folds of fabric in 'A Platonic Lament' and in the first version of 'The Toilette of Salomé' forms the shape of breasts.

The pair of Eastern slippers which appear in the bottom right hand corner are Beardsley's own decorative detail, an overspill intruding into the otherwise relatively serious treatment of the subject. This seems to be another instance of Beardsley's strategy of de-authoring the play by introducing elements which relate to his own schema, but which have nothing to do with Wilde's dramatic construction. Moreover, in the visual lexicon of eighteenth-century erotic/satirical images shoes are one of the principal emblems for female genitalia, and I believe that here they are another sexual joke.⁸

In a facetious reference to Salomé's quasi-cannibalistic statements in her speeches to Iokanaan - 'I will bite your mouth as one bites a ripe fruit' - in this illustration she is given four small pointed teeth, an incongruous detail which literalises her voracious desire to a parodic extent.

The long straggling hairs on the executioner, Namaan's arm and the wart in profile on the right are also facetious and incongruous elements. These hairs may be a reference to Whistler's criticism of Beardsley's work to Joseph Pennell in Paris in May 1893: 'What do you make of that young thing? He has hairs on his hands, hairs on his finger ends, hairs in his ears, hairs on his toes, hairs all over him. And what shoes he wears - hairs growing out of them! Why do you take to him?'⁹ Whistler's rather cryptic remarks were presumably prompted by the calligraphic, hairline flourishes which are so characteristic of Beardsley's early work, for instance in the

⁷ Oscar Wilde, 'Woman's Dress', here quoted from *Aristotle at Afternoon Tea*, p. 55.

⁸ Beardsley plays on the erotic possibilities of shoes in *The Story of Venus and Tannhäuser* when he describes how Florizel snatches one of Venus's slippers, 'fitted the foot over his penis, and made the necessary movements'. Aubrey Beardsley, *The Story of Venus and Tannhäuser: a Romantic Novel* (London: Leonard Smithers, 1907), p. 29.

⁹ Weintraub (1967), p. 52.

first version of 'The Climax', 'J'ai Baisé ta Bouche Iokanaan, J'ai Baisé ta Bouche', reproduced with the *Studio* article about Beardsley which Whistler, as a friend of Pennell's, would surely have seen. Beardsley's inclusion of these comedic hairs can be read as a gesture of defiance in the face of Whistler's criticism, in the same way that the drapery fold jokes seem to be similar gestures towards Morris.

The dots which cascade from Salomé's hair, echoing the fall of blood from Iokanaan's hair, are quite distinct from the dot patterns which surround her hair, and occur nowhere else in the illustrations. They resemble powder, and Beardsley's allusion with this detail is perhaps to the projected stage performance of *Salomé*, for which Wilde planned to have Herodias's hair powdered blue; Sarah Bernhardt responded by insisting that as Salomé her hair should also be powdered blue.¹⁰ Like other details in 'The Dancer's Reward' this is subtle and ambiguous, poised half way between a complimentary rendering of a striking dramatic proposal, and a teasing reminder that the play was censored, and that Wilde's grandiose schemes for the visualisation of *Salomé* had been handed over to Beardsley.

¹⁰ Ellmann, p. 351.

Section xiii

The Climax (figure 71)

'The Climax' is the last full page illustration in *Salomé*. Like its immediate predecessor 'The Dancer's Reward' it illustrates the story closely; both drawings describe the swift trajectory of Wilde's play from Salomé's attainment of the head to her intense and lengthy address to it. As with other illustrations in the sequence, most obviously the title page design and that for the border for the list of pictures, but also 'The Woman in the Moon' and 'A Platonic Lament', and 'Enter Herodias' and 'The Eyes of Herod', 'The Dancer's Reward' and 'The Climax' operate as a pair, closely linked in style and degree of intensity. Here one directly succeeds the other. The illusion that these illustrations create, however, of strong illustrative engagement and of intense drama, is abruptly punctured shortly afterwards by the cynical puppetry of the grotesque tailpiece.

This image of Salomé intensely preoccupied with Iokanaan's severed head, floating in a strange landscape in front of billowing clouds above a dark lake of blood, is a close rendition of the dreamlike and incantatory closing scene of the play, in which Salomé speaks in a trance-like manner to the head, heedless of her audience. This monologue starts from the moment Salomé is presented with the head: 'Ah! thou wouldst not suffer me to kiss thy mouth, Iokanaan. Well! I will kiss it now.'¹ In the course of this speech she taunts Iokanaan for neither looking at her nor speaking to her, and describes her desire: 'I am athirst for thy beauty; I am hungry for thy body; and neither wine nor fruits can appease my desire. What shall I do now, Iokanaan? Neither the floods nor the great waters can quench my passion.'² At the end of Salomé's speech there is a short exchange between Herod and Herodias, and Herod prepares to leave the stage: 'Come! I will not stay here. Come, I tell thee. Surely some terrible thing will befall. Manasseth, Issachar, Ozias, put out the torches. I will not look at things, I will not suffer things to look at me. Put out the torches! Hide the moon! Hide the stars! Let us hide ourselves in our palace, Herodias. I begin to be afraid.'³ The following stage direction reads 'The slaves put out the torches. The stars disappear. The great black cloud crosses the moon and conceals it completely. The stage becomes very dark. The Tetrarch begins to climb the staircase.'⁴ Salomé, still preoccupied with Iokanaan's head, speaks one last time:

¹ *Complete Works*, p. 573.

² *Ibid.*, p. 574.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

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...? But perchance it is the taste of love... They say that love hath a bitter taste... But what of that? What of that? I have kissed thy mouth, Iokanaan.⁵

The stage direction which immediately follows reads: 'a moonbeam falls on Salomé, covering her with light'.⁶ The light effect in 'The Climax' suggests that the illustration describes this precise moment, the immediate aftermath of Salomé's long speech. The predominantly dark areas at the bottom of the image, on the right, and in the top left hand corner suggest that the light area against which Salomé hovers is the moonlight of Wilde's stage direction. The curvature of the black lake below Salomé and the massed crescent shapes to her left are also suggestive of the shape of the moon. As in 'The Eyes of Herod', Beardsley's use of dramatic contrasts between light and dark areas reveals his familiarity with the kinds of light effects used in the theatre, and suggests that his images were at times envisioned more in terms of a theatrical production than of a conventional illustrated book.

'The Climax' has a longer history than any of the other published illustrations to *Salomé*. In conception it owes more to an established tradition of representations of Salomé than any other illustration he made for the sequence. It is indebted particularly to Moreau's 'L'Apparition' (figure 72), in which the severed head appears before Salomé as she dances, hanging in the air in profile with blood pouring down from the neck. Beardsley echoes Moreau's representation of Iokanaan's head, but in his version Salomé also hovers as she grasps the head. The lily which Salomé holds in Moreau's painting is also transferred, growing in Beardsley's illustration from the pool of blood.

This design also has a more immediate genealogy, as it is a second version of the illustration Beardsley drew in response to reading the French edition of Wilde's play, 'J'ai Baisé ta Bouche, Iokanaan, J'ai Baisé ta Bouche' (figure 73). In making a second version of the image Beardsley cut out what Reade refers to as the '*Bon-Mots* hair-line flourishes' of the first version and made the drawing more austere.⁷ There is a great deal less linear negotiation between the black and white planes in 'The Climax', although Beardsley retains the hair-like border around the central white area. He introduces concentric rings of dots around Salomé's hair in place of the spiky decorative lines of the first version. As I suggested in the previous section on 'The Dancer's Reward', the swirling calligraphic lines and playful arabesques which are so typical of Beardsley's early work begin rapidly to disappear in the Summer of 1893, the period in which the *Salomé* illustrations are being produced - possibly as a result

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 575.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Reade, p. 334, n. 261.

of Whistler's criticism of the profusion of these 'hairs'. It may be a result of this criticism that the *Salomé* illustrations form a watershed between his early style and the uncompromising contrasts between black and white planes in his post-*Salomé* work.

'The Climax' also mitigates the grotesquerie of its predecessor 'J'ai Baisé ta Bouche Iokanaan'. The long, rope-like Medusa strands of hair are brought under stricter control. The face is drawn more subtly; the italic nib used in the first version which created Salomé's hollow eye-sockets is exchanged for a standard nib. In the first version Salomé is a quasi-caricatural depiction of the Rossettian type, with massive features and immense and solid hair, and although this suggestion remains in the second version it is absorbed into Beardsley's own style.

In abandoning the distracting decorative detail of 'J'ai Baisé ta Bouche Iokanaan', compositional elements of 'The Climax' are more exposed and as a consequence are invested with greater significance. In the first version an elliptical hole appears in the black 'lake' below Salomé, as if carved through ice to water; yet the implied depth in the surface of the lake makes little sense since the lilies at the front of the image appear to grow from an exposed area of water. In 'The Climax' this hole is changed into a more logical area of shine on the surface of water, in keeping with the area from which the lilies grow. Moreover, in the second version it is shaped like a shield, precisely the same shape as the charger in 'The Dancer's Reward', perhaps suggesting that the charger has just been dropped into the lake. It also prefigures the mode of Salomé's death, which occurs moments after the shaft of moonlight strikes her, when Herod, seeing her, gives the order 'Kill that woman!' upon which, according to the stage direction, '*The soldiers rush forward and crush beneath their shields Salomé, daughter of Herodias, Princess of Judæa*'. The waving shoot which emerges from this hole in the first version remains in the second version but as a result of its greater degree of exposure it is rendered more menacing.

The change of title, from 'J'ai Baisé ta Bouche, Iokanaan, J'ai Baisé ta Bouche' to 'The Climax' speaks of Beardsley's change in attitude towards his position as *Salomé*'s illustrator. The first is a quotation from Salomé's last speech, and is inscribed on the drawing itself, becoming part of the decorative scheme. Calligraphic flourishes trail from the lettering into looping patterns, echoing the fine decorative lines which occur above Salomé's feet and in the space above the two heads at the top of the drawing. These lines are like unravelled writing, Beardsley's tribute to Wilde's powerful and incantatory lines; text and image are entwined. However, for the second version Beardsley elected to chose his own title rather than using a textual precedent, a decision which signals a move away from the acknowledgement of textual authority, towards greater illustrative independence. The

title refers both to the climax of the plot, and to the sexual theme, consummated by Salomé's kiss. Yet despite the changes the two drawings remain very close compositionally in terms of Salomé's pose and expression, the hair and facial expression of the head and the structural forms of the landscape in which they appear.

Although a great play is made throughout the illustrations of Salomé's changing dress, here the plain white garment of 'J'ai Baisé ta Bouche' is transferred with little modification to 'The Climax'. This costume is a shroud: the lengths of material which hang from her arms and her back resemble a winding sheet, and the folds of material which gather around her ankles similarly show it to be a loose sack of fabric. After all the elaborate costumes she wears throughout the sequence, the last one is symbolic, prefiguring her death, which happens only an instant after the scene Beardsley illustrates. Salomé is the officiant in funereal robes in 'The Dancer's Reward', and the shrouded soon-to-be corpse in 'The Climax'.

The egg-like cloud formations are used in the second version too, although they are made bolder, and become more noticeably Whistlerian in design, so there is perhaps another subtle reference to the Peacock Room here. Yet unusually in the *Salomé* sequence, where decorative patterns are usually aggressively independent of the text, here they perhaps serve an illustrative function, referring to one of Herod's bribes, when he describes his pearls as 'half a hundred moons caught in a golden net'.⁸

This close use Beardsley made of an earlier drawing for the *Salomé* commission raises questions about how far 'The Climax' contributes to the satirical thrust of the other illustrations. Beardsley could, of course, only have made the decision to introduce a satirical agenda into the illustrations after he had been offered the *Salomé* contract, which occurred after the production of 'J'ai Baisé ta Bouche'. As a result of its similarity to the earlier design 'The Climax' does not share the balance between illustration and satire which characterises the other drawings. Moreover, as I stated in chapter I, 'The Climax' was one of the first illustrations Beardsley made for the *Salomé* commission, before the series of problems raised by Lane and Wilde strengthened Beardsley's satirical resolve.

⁸ *Complete Works*, p. 572.

Section xiv

Tailpiece¹ (figure 74)

The tailpiece or *cul-de-lampe* occurs on the same page as the last lines of the play. It differs from each of the preceding illustrations in its size (all the other illustrations fill entire pages), its setting on the same page as the text and in its unconcealed frivolity. In appearance the original drawing is rougher than the other illustrations. The pen lines are more sketchy, and this impressionistic quality is compounded by the use of a dry brush in two areas of the drawing to give a rough cloudy texture. Measuring just over three inches at the widest point, the print is exactly the same width as the lines of text.

This final image brings yet another level of inconsistency to the series. The poised drama of the other illustrations has been reduced to what Zatlin has termed 'circus silliness'.² It depicts a couple of grotesque characters, 'a dwarf and a satyr', placing the dead Salomé into an improvised coffin, a cosmetic powder box from which the powder puff has been removed in order to make room for her body.

Tailpieces, common in eighteenth and nineteenth-century books, are vignettes rather than full illustrations. They were not intended, like other illustrations, to make visible some moment of dramatic intensity or narrative significance, but rather to provide a last decorative or calligraphic flourish, an elaborate full stop, a rounding off of a book or sequence of illustrations.³ The tailpiece also differs in its balance of decoration and subject. Usually - and particularly in Rococo vignettes - props are arranged as trophies, and are employed decoratively as framing devices for the distanced figures or the action, for example Bentley's tailpiece for Gray's 'Elegy Written in a Country Church Yard' (figure 75), in which the vault, the smoking torch and the overarching trees provide a strong decorative structure, and the mourners fade into the background. Sometimes this perspective is inverted, as in Thomas Bewick's vignettes for such books as *A General History of Quadrupeds* (1790) and *The History of British Birds* (1797-1804), in which a small bird or animal is foregrounded in such a way as to appear large and to miniaturise its setting. Either way, the tailpiece usually involves a degree of telescoping and alteration of scale.

According to this convention, Beardsley's tailpiece plays complex games with scale. The props - in this case the powder box and the powder puff - are vastly

¹ In the first edition of *Salomé* the drawing is not included in the list of pictures. It is first given the title 'The Burial of Salomé' in the iconography of Beardsley's work by Aymer Vallance, published in Smithers's 1897 collection *A Book of Fifty Drawings*, and is subsequently listed with this title in later editions of *Salomé*.

² Zatlin, *Aubrey Beardsley*, p. 95.

³ See Harthan, pp. 152-158; Owen E. Holloway, *French Rococo Book Illustration* (London: Alec Tiranti, 1969).

outsized, and they act as a trophy, fulfilling a framing and a decorative function. Salomé herself is miniaturised by these props. The clown and satyr appear to be much larger than her (although this is actually a result of their oversized heads and her relative delicacy; if Salomé were standing, she would actually be taller than either). It is a disconcerting image, and the reader is not able to judge whether this is a puppet version of Salomé, or whether the other elements have expanded to match her scale.

The tailpiece often operates as a kind of acknowledgement of fictionality at the end of a literary work. The disorientating shifts in perspective in which characters shrink, inanimate objects grow, decoration assumes a greater role and symbolic emblems take precedence over narrative ones are means by which the image displays its own artifice and the artifice of the literary construct it follows. There is a long and distinguished precedent for literary acknowledgements of fictionality. One of the most celebrated appears at the end of *The Tempest*:

Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits and
Are melted into air, into thin air:
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.⁴

Another at the end of *Vanity Fair*:

Ah! Vanitas Vanitatum! Which of us is happy in this world? Which of us has his desire? or, having it, is satisfied? - Come children, let us shut up the box and the puppets, for our play is played out.⁵

This authorial voice mediates between the reader's state of absorption in a fictional world, and the end of this state. Its effect is to telescope the barely ended fiction, to separate it neatly from other forms of experience. Its intention is not to suspend the reader's disbelief, but to promote it; the reader is reminded that the fictional figures are as insubstantial as dreams, or as lifeless as puppets. By dint of its distance and perspective the device is elevated above the narrative it follows, and often seeks to frame the preceding fiction as a fable. It is from his heavenly (and therefore, we are to suppose, true) perspective, looking back down at the earth at the end of the poem, that the ghost of Chaucer's Troilus 'fully gan despise / This wretched world, and held al

⁴ *The Tempest*, IV.1.148

⁵ William Makepeace Thackeray, *Vanity Fair* (London: Penguin Books, 1968) p. 797.

vanite'.⁶ As these examples illustrate, acknowledgement of fictionality is frequently mixed with vanitas imagery: the end of a literary work becomes a metaphor for the short span of life.

Parody

This authoritative topos is not a route open to subservient illustration unless the illustration follows a textual lead, which in the case of *Salomé* it does not. Wilde's drama ends abruptly, with violent and unpremeditated action: Herod, turning and seeing Salomé still talking intently to the severed head of Iokanaan, gives his soldiers the order 'Kill that woman!', and the play ends with the stage direction '*the soldiers rush forward and crush beneath their shields Salomé, daughter of Herodias, Princess of Judæa.*' In this context, Beardsley's transition into the acknowledgement of fictionality topos, signalled by the playful puppetry of the dwarf and the satyr putting Salomé away in her box, is an abrupt shift, and disrespectful to Wilde's serious dramatic ending.

The image goes further still; this is not a serious, straightforward acknowledgement of fictionality topos or vanitas image, but a parody of one. The clown and the satyr act out a parody of entombment: their improvised powder-box coffin is a joke, the powder puff a frivolous prop, their smiles and knowing looks inappropriate. So this tailpiece has a doubly ironic relation to the text, by the authority inherent in the acknowledgement of fictionality topos, and then by the image's parodic re-working of this trope. Beardsley's use of the conceit is audacious as not only does it overstep the literary territory marked out by Wilde's play, it also deflates Wilde's solemnity; its very proximity to the final words of Wilde's play underlines the contrast between the grand solemnity of the dramatic climax and Beardsley's frivolity. The image takes up approximately the same space as the text, yet its greater boldness draws the eye down as the last page is read, so that repeated glances at the image punctuate any but the most determinedly focused reading. The end of the play is thus shadowed, or indeed over-shadowed, by its own travesty, Bakhtin's inevitable 'comic-ironic *contre-partie*.'⁷

Visual Puns and Sexual Allusions

There are a number of detailed jokes in the tailpiece. The powder-box coffin is labelled 'FIN', signifying the end of the drama. It also functions as a pun: as Rodney

⁶ *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 584.

⁷ Bakhtin, p. 53.

Shewan points out, 'Salomé, of course, uses only the best powder'.⁸ The pun, in fact, may extend further, since in French 'fin' also connotes shrewdness or subtlety. Beardsley's signature hangs directly above this word, corresponding to it: he has the last word in this play, and with it he boasts of his own cleverness. This juxtaposition corresponds to the signature in the title page illustration, which is worshipped by the kneeling satyr.

The large powder puff also encodes a reference to Wilde's homosexuality, since, as I described in the section on 'Enter Herodias', a 'powder puff' was a contemporary slang term for a homosexual man. The book ends as it begins, with a caricature of the author. As well as this reference to homosexuality, the joke is also about waning cultural status, since the puff lies displaced from its box, next to the word 'fin'. In this way it corresponds to the portrait of Wilde in the frontispiece to the play, in which he is presented as a moon on the wane.

Satyrs, which were traditionally represented with coarse, goat-like features, are typically represented nude, as here; had the powder puff not concealed the left hand figure's legs, then we might see that they were those of a goat. They are typically represented as crude, lustful and earthy. As with the sitting boy in the first version of the 'Toilette of Salomé', the satyr's back here is bent in such a way as to suggest a sexually degenerate physical type. His lustful persona is appropriate; although Salomé's feet are hidden from view by the powder puff, they are clearly in a position to arouse him sexually, and his expression hints that this is indeed the case. Beardsley's phallic signature hovers just in front of his face, like a think-bubble.

Satyr / Satire

Although this has never been acknowledged in other commentaries, the satyr face drawn here is actually a mask: the line of the cord holding the mask on runs down his neck, beginning at his ear-lobe and disappearing at his shoulder, and the jawline and earlobe at the edge of the mask have a distinct outline against the figure's neck. Fittingly for the image's position at the end of the play, the trappings of fictionality begin to be distinguished, and the characters are exposed as actors. The powder box and puff imply stage makeup, itself a species of mask. At the end of the play dramatic identities begin to be cast off and to become instead symbolic props.

The satyr's mask also directly relates to the practice of satire. It was once thought that the Latin *satira* derived from the Greek *satyr* in allusion to the chorus of

⁸ Rodney Shewan, 'Love, Death, and Criticism: Three of Beardsley's Culs-de-lampe', in *Reconsidering Aubrey Beardsley*, ed. by Robert Langenfeld (London: U.M.I. Research Press, 1989), p. 136.

satyrs which gave its name to the Greek 'satyric' drama.⁹ As a result of this assumption, frontispieces and title pages of works by Roman satirists sometimes show the author receiving a mask in the form of a satyr's face as a mark of distinction in their literary field, in the same way that poets might be represented with Apollo's lyre. A title page to Horace's works published in 1642 designed by Poussin shows Horace being presented with a satyr mask, whilst a hovering putto waits to crown him with a wreath (figure 76). According to this convention, Beardsley's masked figure can be interpreted as a satirist, and his mask can be read as a badge of achievement in this art. The tailpiece is thus a travesty of a title page or frontispiece, as it presents Beardsley's self-portrait, the anointed master of satire burying Salomé, accompanied by his clown alter-ego.

Ludic Behaviour

The clown figure is dressed, according to convention, in an ill-fitting black suit: baggy trousers hitched up to make them half-mast, and a jacket with sticking-out coat tails. His cloud of hair frames and accentuates rather than hides his bald head. He too wears a mask. It is a typically clownish manoeuvre comically, yet resourcefully, to use an inappropriate piece of equipment for the serious task of burial. Yet an unsettling clownish logic also tells us that a powder-box is, of course, an appropriate place for interment: dust to dust. Like all clowns, this figure is sinister; in a manner which is in equal part knowing and naïve, he looks directly at the viewer over Salomé's hair. It is impossible fully to read his expression because of his mask.

The inclusion of this clown is, of course, deeply inappropriate in the context of Wilde's tragedy. Its presence seems to me to make a direct reference to the comedic behaviour of the illustrations.

Travesty

This image has connotations not only of classical but also of Christian iconography, as it recalls the Entombment of Christ. In this way it is a companion piece to the title page drawing, which with its three dominant verticals - two flaming candles and a central herm - and a kneeling figure at the foot, is, as I have said, a Crucifixion tableau. In the tailpiece, Pan and the clown stand in for Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathaea, who are supposed to have lifted Christ's body from the cross. Traditionally Joseph and Nicodemus are distinguished by their dress, the former being richly and elegantly clad, the latter of a lowly appearance. This distinction is

⁹ This idea has been discountenanced. As I described in chapter II, it derives from *lanx satura* (full dish). See J. Wight Duff, *Roman Satire: Its Outlook on Social Life* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1936), p. 14.

comically interpreted here, the clown's suit as fine apparel in relation to the nudity of the Pan figure.

This image has its origin in the tradition of the medieval Feast of Fools, or December Liberties, in which every aspect of a normal church service was travestied: the prayers by obscene parodies, the hymns by obscene songs, the burning of incense by smoke from old burnt shoes, and the quiet, respectful behaviour in the congregation by gaming, gambling and sexual behaviour.¹⁰ Members of the congregation would wear masks, often representing beasts. All kinds of traditionally ludic behaviour took the place of Ecclesiastic solemnity; the lowest form of drama and spectacle a comedic substitute for the highest. In Beardsley's tailpiece, the Entombment travesty, the bestial mask, the Pan figure's sexual behaviour, the parodic coffin, the clown's black halo and the mood of frivolity all seem to be precisely in this vein of parody. All authority and propriety are mocked, and Wilde's play is subverted.

The tailpiece articulates Beardsley's satirical agenda more strongly than any other illustration; the extra degree of illustrative licence granted by the tailpiece form is fully exploited. The ludic behaviour and satire which are such a consistent presence throughout the sequence of illustrations are finally embodied by the clown and the satyr, Beardsley's Parthian shots at the end of the illustrative sequence.

¹⁰ William Hone, *Ancient Mysteries Described, especially the English Miracle Plays, founded on Apocryphal New Testament Story, extant among the unpublished manuscripts in the British Museum; including notices of Ecclesiastical Shows, the Festivals of Fools and Asses, the English Boy Bishop, the Descent into Hell, the Lord Mayor's Show, the Guildhall Giants, Christmas Carols, &c.* (London: William Hone, 1823), pp. 158-160.

Section xv

John and Salomé¹ (figure 77)

This drawing has always presented problems for analysis. As Reade puts it, 'it is difficult to analyse a drawing in which every detail contributes so forcibly to the subject of tension between the yearning Salomé on the right and the resistant John the Baptist on the left - in whom something nevertheless responds to the princess.'² The drawing has barely been discussed by more recent commentators. Indeed, the illustration is remarkably free of the grotesque staffage and incidental detail which characterise so many of the other illustrations, and consequently it is harder to apply the analysis which has yielded results elsewhere, in terms of tensions between the illustrative and the non-illustrative, the sincere and the satirical.

Plagiarism

However, a subtly satirical point is made here, as with 'The Peacock Skirt', 'The Black Cape', 'The Eyes of Herod' and 'The Stomach Dance', in Salomé's costume. As in these other illustrations, Salomé's elaborate dress is employed to commentate on Wilde's plagiarism, and its forms and details refer to the works of three authors or artists to whom Beardsley refers repeatedly throughout the suite of illustrations: Huysmans, Flaubert and Whistler.

The principal reference seems to be to the passage in Huysmans's *A rebours* in which des Esseintes looks at Moreau's two most famous images of Salomé. Huysmans describes the figure of Salomé in 'L'Apparition' thus: 'She is almost naked; in the heat of the dance her veils have fallen away and her brocade robes slipped to the floor, so that now she is clad only in wrought metals and translucent gems. A gorgerin grips her waist like a corselet, and like an outsize clasp a wondrous jewel sparkles and flashes in the cleft between her breasts; lower down, a girdle encircles her hips [...] finally, where the body shows bare between gorgerin and girdle, the belly bulges out, dimpled by a navel which resembles a graven seal of onyx with its milky hues and rosy finger-nail tints.'³

¹ 'John and Salomé' was one of the drawings which was rejected during the third and final period of negotiations between Lane, Beardsley and Wilde. I can offer no explanation for this exclusion, since it is free of the sexual jokes which appear in drawings which were passed for publication.

² Reade, *Beardsley*, p. 338, n. 290.

³ 'Elle est presque nue; dans l'ardeur de la danse, les voiles se sont défaits, les brocarts ont croulé; elle n'est plus vêtue que de matières orfévries et de minéraux lucides; un gorgerin lui serre de même qu'un corselet la taille, et, ainsi qu'une agrafe superbe, un merveilleux joyau darde des éclairs dans la rainure de ses deux seins; plus bas, aux hanches, une ceinture l'entoure [...] enfin, sur le corps resté nu, entre le gorgerin et la ceinture, le ventre bombe, creusé d'un nombril dont le trou semble un cachet gravé d'onyx, aux tons laiteux, aux teintes de rose d'ongle.' Here quoted from Huysmans, *Against Nature*, pp. 67-68.

Beardsley follows this description closely in 'John and Salomé'. Salomé wears a band around her waist, and another around her hips, leaving her stomach bare and bulging out between these bands; also, her navel is strongly delineated. Between her breasts she wears a large elaborate clasp. Additionally, during Huysmans's description of Moreau's painting 'Salomé' he writes that Salomé's costume appears to be covered with 'gorgeous insects',⁴ which the three butterflies on Salomé's skirt in Beardsley's drawing illustrate. There are also echoes of Moreau's actual depiction of Salomé in 'L'Apparition' in Beardsley's drawing, in Salomé's elaborate helmet and her thick braid of hair, elements in the drawing not recorded by Huysmans. As in the border design, it is clear from the kinds of visual references Beardsley makes that he was familiar both with Moreau's Salomés and Huysmans' descriptions, since both have exclusive information.

In Flaubert's 'Hérodias', the story cited by many critics of the first version of *Salomé* as Wilde's primary source, Iokanaan describes 'the little golden crescents that tremble on [Herodias's] brow',⁵ and five crescent shapes decorate Salomé's head-dress here. Flaubert's descriptions of costumes in 'Hérodias', *La Tentation de Saint Antoine* and *Salammbô* are lengthy and detailed, and the costumes he describes are elaborate and highly decorated, and Beardsley's insistence upon the complexity of Salomé's dress and its frequent changes throughout the sequence of illustrations seems to be a parody of this trait.

As in 'The Peacock Skirt', Salomé's skirt in this illustration is decorated with Whistlerian motifs, clusters of crescent shapes and three stylised butterflies. Another butterfly appears on Salomé's left shoulder, and from the stems of the flowers which appear on the right of the illustration emanate concentric rings of dots. As in the other illustrations which replicate details of Whistler's decoration of the Peacock Room, this design both shows the strength of Whistler's influence on Beardsley - evidence of the 'Whistlerian tremens' which he had jokingly discussed with Rothenstein during the Summer of 1893⁶ - and is suggestive of the famous stories of Wilde's alleged plagiarism of Whistler.

Titular Disobedience

The title of the illustration creates another difficulty in reading this design as straightforwardly illustrative and innocent of satirical jokes. It is subtly subversive - why is it not called 'Iokanaan and Salomé', a title which would have been faithful to the nomenclature of the play? Wilde insisted on 'Iokanaan' for John the Baptist,

⁴ '... ainsi que des insectes splendides aux élytres éblouissants ...' *Ibid.*, p. 64.

⁵ '... les petits croissants d'or qui tremblent sur ton front ...' Here quoted from Flaubert, *Three Tales*, p. 108.

⁶ Sturgis, *Aubrey Beardsley*, p. 147.

following Flaubert, whose lengthy research into all material relating to the story, archaeological, geographical and Biblical, led him to use the laboriously correct 'Iokanaan', when the conventional version was John the Baptist, or *Jean-Baptiste*.⁷ Beardsley's comparatively prosaic 'John' is an instance of subtle subversion and illustrative disobedience; the substitution implies a corrective to Wilde's grandiose, and perhaps plagiaristic, use of language, and implicitly draws attention to the self-conscious grandiloquence of 'Iokanaan'.

It is possible too that this gratuitous use of 'John' is a reference to a non-fictional character, Wilde's friend John Gray, with whom he had become friends (and who possibly became a lover) in 1889.⁸ Wilde had used Gray's name for the hero of his novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in order to flatter his friend by suggesting his likeness to the exquisite young man of his fiction. That he had done so was public knowledge, and indeed the conceit was perpetuated by Gray himself, who took to signing his name as 'Dorian', and by other members of Wilde's coterie who began to use this sobriquet. With this social context in mind, it may be that Beardsley was using the name John in order to refer archly to Wilde's use of Gray as a model in his fiction, as a character who inspires lust in others, an innuendo which relates to the homosexual basis of Wilde's relationship with Gray.

⁷ Zagona, p. 70.

⁸ Ellmann, pp. 290-291; Sturgis, *Passionate Attitudes*, pp. 91-92.

Section xvi

Salomé on Settle, or Maîtresse d'Orchestre (figure 78)

Among the group of *Salomé* drawings, despite their great diversity, there is one real anomaly. 'Salomé on Settle', otherwise known as 'Maîtresse d'orchestre' is not only in subject matter and treatment dissimilar to the other illustrations, but also has a unique and remarkable publication history.

When Beardsley refers in his November 1893 letter to Ross to having withdrawn three drawings and filled their places with three others, one drawing which has, since critical work began to be done on Beardsley during the late 1960s, been listed amongst those rejected by Lane is 'Salomé on Settle'. Reade, although acknowledging that the 'drawing has no reference to any passage in the play', makes the assumption that it had originally been made for *Salomé*, and suggests that it had been excluded 'possibly because the baton could be interpreted as a dildo.'¹ Although in the first edition of his biography of Beardsley of 1967 Stanley Weintraub does not refer to the drawing, in his revised edition of 1976 he comments that 'Salomé on Settle' 'was intended as a replacement for one of the more obviously erotic drawings for *Salomé* but not used, perhaps because the publisher interpreted the back view of the figure as indicating an open kimono, and the wand or baton, therefore, as dildo.'² Fletcher, Zatlin, Snodgrass and Sturgis follow Reade and Weintraub in assuming that 'Salomé on Settle' was made for the *Salomé* commission but not included.³

However, the production history of this drawing is complicated and obscure, and although it is convenient to assume that 'Salomé on Settle' is one of the drawings to which Beardsley refers in his letter to Ross, I do not think that this is the case.

The first collected edition of Beardsley's work, *A Book of Fifty Drawings*, was published by Leonard Smithers in 1897 with Beardsley's collaboration. According to Beardsley's wishes the book contains an iconography of his work specially commissioned from Aymer Vallance.⁴ This iconography lists in detail all the drawings produced for the *Salomé* commission, including the unpublished drawings such as 'John and Salomé' and the first version of 'The Toilette of Salomé' and the peacock-feather cover; there are even notes detailing which drawings were substituted for which others, and a note on the two states of 'Enter Herodias'. Yet 'Salomé on Settle' is not included in the list. Beardsley's letters to his publisher indicate that he

¹ Reade, *Beardsley*, p. 337, n. 289.

² Stanley Weintraub, *Aubrey Beardsley: Imp of the Perverse* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976), p. 77.

³ Fletcher, p. 80; Zatlin, *Aubrey Beardsley*, p. 114; Snodgrass, *Aubrey Beardsley*, p. 300, n. 6; Sturgis, *Aubrey Beardsley*, p. 161.

⁴ *The Letters of Aubrey Beardsley*, p. 152.

was closely involved in Vallance's iconography; in September 1896 he writes in a letter to Smithers: 'I am distressed at what you tell me about Vallance. The iconography will be very bad if it is not good. We must not spare our tongues in licking it ship-shape.'⁵ A month later it is clear that Beardsley is checking and altering the manuscript himself: 'The iconography turns out very nicely. I have made a few additions etc in purple pencil.'⁶ By November Beardsley refers to checking and suggesting additions to the proof of the iconography, and a week later he writes with satisfaction 'So glad to hear of the iconography, that all goes well with it'.⁷ This thoroughness and continued attention from the beginning of the project to its publication makes it extremely unlikely that there were any major mistakes or lacunae. If 'Maîtresse d'orchestre' had been made for the *Salomé* commission, even if it were in the odd position of having been produced as a substitute for a rejected drawing and then rejected itself, then it would surely have been included in this list.

The first time the drawing was published was in Lane's 1899 book *The Early Work of Aubrey Beardsley*. Here it is published as number 80 with the title 'Maîtresse d'orchestre'; no alternative title is given. It is not grouped amongst the *Salomé* drawings (numbers 23-41), but at the end of a group mostly consisting of *Yellow Book* images, and there is nothing in the captions or in the placing to link the drawing with the *Salomé* commission.

In his 1900 catalogue of Beardsley's drawings A. E. Gallatin refers to the drawing as 'Maîtresse d'orchestre', with the note 'same motif as grotesque on page 53 of *Bon Mots of Foote and Hook*', and his revised catalogue of 1903 lists it in the same way, separately from the *Salomé* drawings.⁸

Smithers' pirated edition of *Salomé* of 1904 includes previously suppressed illustrations, including the first version of the cover design. All sixteen images are listed individually, with the note 'hitherto suppressed' beneath 'John and Salomé' and the first version of 'The Toilette of Salomé'. It is clear from this that Smithers was stealing a march on Lane and making a selling point of this inclusiveness and of the publication of suppressed drawings. Yet even here 'Maîtresse d'orchestre' is not included.

Lane's 1906 edition of *Salomé* (dated 1907 on the title page) includes amongst its 16 plates the suppressed illustrations: the first version of 'The Toilette of Salomé' and 'John and Salomé', as well as the alternative cover design, but does not include 'Maîtresse d'orchestre'.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 200; p. 204.

⁸ A. E. Gallatin, *List of Drawings by Aubrey Beardsley* (New York: M. F. Mansfield & A. Wessels, 1900), p. 6; A. E. Gallatin, *Aubrey Beardsley's Drawings: A Catalogue: and a List of Criticisms* (New York: Godfrey A. S. Wieners, 1903), p. 35.

The first time a link with the other *Salomé* drawings is established is in 1907, when despite it having had no previous connection with this group of illustrations, it is published in Lane's *Salomé* portfolio, a collection of plates without text, as number XVI. This is the point at which the name 'Salomé on Settle' is apparently first applied to the drawing.

A clue to why this anomaly might have arisen can be found in advertisements for Lane's 1906 edition of the play and his 1907 portfolio of *Salomé* drawings. In the back of Ross's 1909 biography of Beardsley Lane advertises, on the same page, both these publications. The description of the portfolio refers obliquely to 'Salomé on Settle': 'included among them is a drawing originally done as an illustration to *Salomé*, but not included in the volume when published.' The write-up goes on: 'This masterly series of designs is without doubt Beardsley's *chef d'œuvre*, and the care which has been taken in the production of the blocks makes prints equal in effect to the originals themselves.'⁹ These two elements, the promise of a new unseen drawing and the quality of the plates (for which new blocks were made), seems to me to be Lane's ploy to differentiate the portfolio and his new edition of the play. Two publications which might have seemed too similar to launch within a few months of each other are presented as complementary: each contained something which was withheld from the other. Moreover, Lane was clearly keen to capitalise on the notoriety of the *Salomé* drawings.

Ross's biography also contains a revised iconography by Aymer Vallance, in which 'Salomé on Settle' is mentioned ambiguously, and only in a note at the end of the list of *Salomé* drawings: 'The *Salomé* drawings were reproduced the actual size of the originals and published in a portfolio. In this was included a design of Salomé seated upon a settee. Described in *Early Work* as "Maîtresse d'Orchestre."¹⁰

When Lane revised and reissued *The Early Work of Aubrey Beardsley* in 1912 it was with a note describing the 'considerable rearrangement of the plates' undertaken for this second edition. What had in the first edition of *Early Work* been grouped amongst the *Yellow Book* drawings and called 'Maîtresse d'orchestre' is for this edition referred to as 'Salomé on Settle' and included with the other *Salomé* drawings.

Significantly, in the sale catalogue for *The John Lane Collection of Original Drawings by Aubrey Beardsley*, an auction held at the Anderson Galleries in New York in 1926 following Lane's death, the drawing reverts to its place with *Yellow Book* rather than with *Salomé* drawings. All of Lane's *Salomé* pictures are listed near the end of the catalogue, a reflection of their desirability, with a section following of

⁹ Ross, unnumbered page.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

‘suppressed plates’, which only lists ‘John and Salomé’ and ‘The Toilette of Salomé’. ‘La Maîtresse d’orchestre’, as it is again known, is listed earlier in the catalogue with five other drawings ‘from the archives of *The Yellow Book*’.

Its history strongly suggests that this drawing was not made for the *Salomé* commission, and that it was only attached to the *Salomé* project and renamed by Lane when he saw the potential financial advantage of passing off an unused *Yellow Book* drawing as a previously unseen *Salomé* illustration. Moreover, he was in a position of having to best his rival Smithers, who had pre-empted Lane by publishing the bona fide suppressed drawings in 1904. Far from having been too cautious and anxious to publish the drawing in 1894, it seems that Lane was a canny enough businessman to court publicity by choosing and renaming this drawing for inclusion in the portfolio. If this is the case, then it was in order to protect his integrity as a publisher and to maintain the illusion that it was after all a *Salomé* drawing that he renamed it and moved it for the second edition of the *Early Work*, which followed the portfolio and the second illustrated edition. If it had been produced as part of the *Salomé* commission, then there is no clear reason why Lane should not have listed it as such in his 1899 edition of the *Early Work*.

Another clue is in Stuart Mason’s 1914 bibliography of Wilde, where he notes of the 1894 edition of *Salomé*: ‘two drawings and a cover design prepared for this edition were cancelled...’¹¹ These ‘two drawings’ have to be the first version of ‘The Toilette of Salomé’ and ‘John and Salomé’. ‘Salomé on Settle’ is not mentioned in this context, although Mason does note that this drawing was included in Lane’s 1907 portfolio of *Salomé* drawings.

So Mason, although he knew about ‘Salomé on Settle’, does not include it as one of the rejected drawings. Mason might simply have made a reasonable assumption based on the published editions of *Salomé*, basing his tally on the three previously suppressed drawings which appeared in Lane’s 1906 edition of *Salomé*, drawings which did not include ‘Salomé on Settle’. It is also possible that he knew from Ross or Lane, both of whom are acknowledged in his preface, that ‘Salomé on Settle’ was not made for the *Salomé* commission; either figure could have given him precise information about exactly which drawings were rejected initially from the *Salomé* group. Ross, who wrote an introduction for the bibliography, was a close friend of Mason’s, and supported him financially during this period.¹²

Lane’s inclusion of ‘Maîtresse d’orchestre’ as ‘Salomé on Settle’ in the *Salomé* portfolio has muddied the waters ever since. Then with Reade’s assumption,

¹¹ Stuart Mason, *Bibliography of Oscar Wilde* (London: T. Werner Laurie, 1914), p. 380.

¹² H. Montgomery Hyde, *Christopher Sclater Millard (Stuart Mason): Bibliographer & Antiquarian Book Dealer* (New York: Global Academic Publishers, 1990), pp. 24-25.

based on the drawing's inclusion in the portfolio, that it must have been one of the rejected drawings, 'Salomé on Settle' came to be firmly established as part of the *Salomé* canon, with the result that its ambiguous history and vicissitudes were unintentionally suppressed.

The problem is exacerbated when Reade's often mandarin pronouncements are followed unquestioningly. In her account of the drawing Zatlin takes Reade's and Weintraub's suggestions to be factual. She reads the drawing as an unequivocal masturbation scene signalled by 'Salomé's hidden left hand and, as John Lane believed, the open kimono and the baton-as-dildo in her right hand...' ¹³ Her assertion of what 'John Lane believed', which she backs up with a footnote citing Weintraub who in fact only raises a cautious suggestion, is misleading since there is no evidence of what Lane thought or said about this illustration. In presenting an assumption as verifiable fact, Zatlin obscures traces of a mystery which, even though it may never be completely solved, nevertheless deserves to be acknowledged.

'Maîtresse d'orchestre' has several qualities which would have made it a convincing choice as a previously unpublished *Salomé* illustration. The extraordinary freedom of subject matter which characterises the *Salomé* illustrations allowed a great degree of leeway, since illustrations such as 'The Black Cape' and the title page design have little in common with each other either in style or subject matter. The ambiguity of subject in 'Maîtresse d'orchestre' perhaps suggested its suitability. Moreover, the strong black and white planes, Japonese composition and triple ruled border lines give it a broad affinity to some of the *Salomé* illustrations, even if stylistically it is sparer.

Yet the drawing seems to me to have more in common with the nature of Beardsley's *Yellow Book* contributions than his *Salomé* work, which date from April 1894 to April 1895. The subject seems to be Beardsley's own invention rather than an illustration to a text, a factor which would dovetail with other *Yellow Book* pictures which were published as autonomous images. It seems likely that Beardsley produced it for an edition of the *Yellow Book*, which would explain how it became Lane's property. That it was not published was not an extraordinary omission, as many of Beardsley's drawings were not published in the books for which they were drawn; for example, in his 1900 catalogue Gallatin lists twenty-nine previously unpublished drawings which were included in Smithers's publication *A Second Book of Fifty Drawings* of 1899, and twenty-four which were published in the *Early Work*. ¹⁴ It could also be that the drawing was intended for a later edition of the *Yellow Book*;

¹³ Zatlin, *Aubrey Beardsley*, p. 114.

¹⁴ Gallatin's reckoning is slightly misleading, since one of the drawings he lists, 'Lysistrata Haranguing the Athenian Women', had been published privately by Smithers in 1896.

Beardsley's drawings were withdrawn from the fifth number, published in April 1895, when he was sacked from his position as art editor of the journal at the moment of Wilde's arrest.¹⁵

As Gallatin records, 'Maîtresse d'orchestre' is a larger (and slightly altered) version of the grotesque which appeared on p. 53 of *Bon Mots of Foote and Hook* in 1894 (figure 79).¹⁶ It also bears compositional similarity to a drawing Beardsley made as an invitation card for Lane's *Sette of Odd Volumes: Smoke* early in 1895 (figure 80).¹⁷ In this version the woman has become a pierrot and her baton has been substituted for a cigar, yet the sitting position and the position of the toe of the shoe are similar. This similarity may suggest a possible date for 'Maîtresse d'orchestre' as early 1895.

Another crucial factor which unites the *Salomé* illustrations is lacking. Although, as Reade remarks in his entry for 'Salomé on Settle', the drawing is wittily signed on the corner of the settle by lines which form Beardsley's signature but which also describe folds of fabric and upholstery studs, one element which appears in all the other illustrations to *Salomé* is a strong signatory device which features very prominently in each drawing.¹⁸ In the *Yellow Book* era this signature becomes more discreet and appears only sporadically until it is dropped altogether. The fine lines, simplicity and discreet placing of the signature here correspond most closely to the manner in which Beardsley often signed his work during the period 1894/95.

¹⁵ Weintraub (1967), pp. 123-125.

¹⁶ Gallatin, *List of Drawings*, p. 6.

¹⁷ Reade, *Beardsley*, p. 349, n. 382.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 337, n. 289.

Conclusion

I have argued that Beardsley's satirical challenge in the *Salomé* illustrations is both outspoken and sustained. The comedic laughter of the figures on the title page, directly opposing the 'tragedy' in the title which they frame, effectively flags up Beardsley's intentions, and the figure wearing the satyr's mask, emblem of the satirist's art, burying Salomé in the tailpiece, is a powerful gesture connoting a satirical task completed. These pointed images top and tail an extraordinary number of jokes at Wilde's expense in the other illustrations. That these jokes play upon a limited number of recurrent themes adds weight to my proposal of the existence of a strong satirical agenda, rather than isolated occurrences.

I have suggested that the reason why Beardsley's sustained and rigorous satire in this arena has never been acknowledged has much to do with expectations of the illustrative form, for which satire is deeply antipathetic. It also, perhaps, has to do with the nature of Beardsley's imagery. Throughout the illustrations the satirical allusions resolve themselves broadly into a dual satirical structure. On the one hand the extra-textual staffage of clowns, satyrs, dwarves and putti which appear in so many of the designs amounts to a carnivalesque subversion of what is ostensibly the main focus of the image. These inelegant gargoyles point and stare, smile and grin directly out at the reader, flash erect penises and stick out their tongues, and flaunt deformed, bestial bodies and grotesque faces. On the other hand the representations of characters from Wilde's play correspond closely to the Renaissance ideal, with smooth well-proportioned bodies and impassive or rapt expressions.

The grotesque figures are comedic marginalia, and it was probably to these that Wilde himself referred when he called the illustrations 'the naughty scribbles a precocious schoolboy makes on the margins of his copybooks'.¹ The other figures, the representations of characters from Wilde's play, have always been interpreted as central, more or less immune to the capers the carnival figures cut around them. Hence, perhaps, the reluctance to acknowledge any real or sustained satirical agenda; it is this disjuncture, more than any other feature, which has assisted in the perpetuation of the idea that satire exists only in isolated pockets. Nonetheless, I would argue that the grotesque marginal figures are not discrete eruptions of subversion and whimsical grotesquerie, but that they actually serve to direct the

¹ Ricketts, *Oscar Wilde*, pp. 51-52.

reader to the more subtle satirical and parodic narratives in the illustrations. They are signposts, or footnotes, to Beardsley's broader satirical strategies. Despite the contrasting physical propriety of the 'central' textual figures and their frequent contributions to the story's narrative, they express, as I have argued, a more subtle and allusive kind of satire: at times their costumes indicate plagiarism by their relation to other *Salomé* texts of the late nineteenth century, their delicate gestures potential sexual activity, or their activities a bathetic repudiation of the solemnity of Wilde's play. The subtlety and the in-jokes expressed by these figures are not readily available to a modern reader, and the further we get from 1893 the less apparent they become without complex historical reconstruction and literary sifting. In fact, the complexity of some of Beardsley's jokes made them mostly inaccessible at the time to all but a small audience of cognoscenti who constituted his projected audience.² Although Beardsley's satirical structures and methods were drawn from conventional schemata, his meanings frequently relied upon particular and localised frames of reference.

Another problem with the acknowledgement of Beardsley's satire in a modern academic context is its frequently dubious subject matter; many of the jokes Beardsley makes about Wilde play upon the fact of his homosexuality. This at the time was an acceptable target for satire - it was shared by Beerbohm and many other satirists before him - and it also relates to ancient carnival licence, a licence which Beardsley revives and adopts in *Salomé*. As Umberto Eco writes in an article about the present predicament of political satire, 'Everything was permitted during carnival, even the songs that the Roman legionnaires would sing, calling Julius Caesar "queen", alluding, in a very transparent way, to his real, or presumed, homosexual escapades.'³ Of course, after Wilde's arrest jokes about his homosexuality ceased to be funny, and the effective taboo of the whole subject after 1895 may have inhibited investigation into this aspect of Beardsley's work.

Wilde's current exalted position as a gay icon and martyr makes the jokes even more problematic. To a modern liberal audience they appear to be prejudiced, offensive, tasteless, schoolboyish and deserving of censure, so it is little wonder that these aspects have been shied away from in favour of what are now more acceptable aspects of Beardsley's work. Often these more acceptable aspects have

² Jestin makes a similar observation about 'the witty and complex interplay of text and design' of Bentley's illustrations for Gray's poems, which, although entertaining for Bentley's principal projected reader, Walpole, 'proved not to be for the general public.' (Jestin, p. 213.)

³ Umberto Eco, 'Don't Smile When You Say That', *The Guardian* (Saturday Review), 22 June 2002, p. 7. Of course, camp homosexuality has not ceased to be treated as a source of comedy in popular culture.

been exaggerated. Zatlin spearheads this powerful revisionist tendency in devoting a book-length study to the, to me, unconvincing theory that Beardsley was above all an active campaigner for women's rights in his work, a 'social commentator' who 'employed his skill' in order 'to promote a healthier sexuality for men and women.'⁴ Nonetheless, my task here has not been to refashion Beardsley so that he finds approval with a modern audience, but to present dispassionately the jokes present in his work, funny or not.

Similarly, Wilde's writing has in recent years been subject to reappraisal, and his literary originality and skill reassessed and asserted.⁵ As a result, lengthy accounts of how he was viewed by so many critics and reviewers in the 1880s and 1890s as a plagiarist, without any revision of those views, are also likely to be received frostily, as though they undermine this important critical repositioning. Again, I want to make it clear that these contemporary views are not my opinions; my tack has not been to assess Wilde's worth as a writer, nor to give a close reading of *Salomé*, but to survey and analyse contemporary reactions - mainly satirical - to these issues. It has not been my purpose to evaluate the justification of Beardsley's satire nor to defend the implications of his caricatures of Wilde, but to draw attention for the first time to their existence and to place them in their historical contexts.

To conclude, my project here has been to give an account of what Beardsley's imagery meant to a small contemporary audience by identifying his jokes and to debunk the idea that his illustrations to *Salomé* have meanings which are mysterious and undiscoverable. My proposal is that the images are both more and less outrageous than was supposed by contemporary commentators. More because they ignore the tasks and proprieties of book illustration, introduce sexual jokes, thoroughly impugn Wilde in a variety of complex ways, caricature other figures and insult his play. Less because they are not actually 'incomprehensible', the principal criticism levelled against them in the press at the time of publication. The anarchy and disorder implied by the charge of incomprehensibility and feared by conservative critics as indicators of decadence and degeneracy are not at large in these highly ordered images. Nor do I support the view that the images are so endlessly plural, as Snodgrass proposes, nor so intractable, as Frankel asserts, as to be unsusceptible to positive interpretations along conventional lines. The references Beardsley makes - classical, literary, popular, punning - are outside the

⁴ Zatlin, *Aubrey Beardsley*, p. 203.

experience offered by Wilde's text, but relate to coherent and accessible bodies of knowledge.

Similarly, Beardsley's satirical strategies are drawn directly from the methodologies of the satires and parodies of Wilde written by his friends and contemporaries Beerbohm and Levenson, from Laforgue's literary parodies, and from caricatures and cartoons in popular magazines like *Punch*. Beardsley's satire is evaluative and adversarial, and as such it is arguable that for his approach Beardsley is indebted in the first instance to Beerbohm's disingenuous aspersions and Levenson's knowing skits, and in the second to Whistler's shrill invective. Beardsley works in both these modes, sometimes through subtle allusion, sometimes through outright challenge. In fact, Beardsley was surrounded by a coterie for whom caricaturing and satirising Wilde, usually without malice, was effectively the norm. Those friends who were not writers or artists often made jokes at Wilde's expense; in a letter Beerbohm relates an occasion in September 1893 where Ross 'offended Oscar most *fearfully* by telling him that whatever his shortcomings may be - and there are many - no one can deny that he is a gentleman of the old school.' Beerbohm goes on: 'Isn't it exquisitely funny? There *is* something rather Georgian in Oscar's deportment.'⁶ Early biographies of Wilde and memoirs in which he is described also tend to subject him to a degree of amused or disparaging criticism; for example, Vincent O'Sullivan's 1936 book *Aspects of Wilde* hosts an unflattering evaluative commentary. Indeed, Wilde's principal illustrator Ricketts stands out as something of an anomaly in that he did *not* satirise Wilde.

Ultimately, in the *Salomé* illustrations Beardsley created a hybrid form of satire and illustration. This strategy is a logical one since satirical images operate in much the same way as illustrations, in that they do not stand alone, but are dependent upon historical or literary phenomena. Beardsley's classical references, literary allusions and references to a homosexual underworld are external to Wilde's text, yet they still encode meaning in conventional ways. So despite the heterogeneity of their terms, and despite their radical subversion of the illustrative form, when read as satirical images these illustrations tell a coherent and comprehensible tale.

⁵ See, for instance, Joseph Donohue, 'Distance, Death and Desire in *Salomé*', in *The Cambridge Companion to Oscar Wilde*, ed. by Peter Raby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁶ *Letters to Reggie Turner*, p. 72

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