



## Performative betrayals: Christian gender politics or Christianity on trial in Oscar Wilde's Salomé

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Résumé en anglais

Oscar Wilde's symbolist drama *Salomé* (1892) was written directly in French, a language the playwright "adore[d] without speaking it well" (Ellmann). In order to avoid awkward phrasing in the dialogues, Wilde minimized the importance of language in favour of the show. In consequence in *Salomé* silence is at least as important as speech, and showing or suggesting through performance makes up for telling. The eponymous heroine is therefore mainly shaped by quotations. These are either stated by third characters or "translated" into images through performance. The enunciated quotations epitomize the male characters' gaze while the "performed" ones, which are actually scraps and bits from Biblical, Greek and Roman myths, are more inherent with *Salomé's* "essential nature". Consequently, in this gender-oriented drama, *Salomé* appears as a discursive and plastic construct which brings together male representations of the feminine as both an ideal and a threat (notably the 19th century myth of the *femme fatale*) as well as performative evocations of archetypal female characters (such as Isis, Ishtar). The above characterization process aims at opposing two versions of a Janus-faced *Salomé*, whose identity can either be a man's issue lying outside her control, or an embodiment of the archetypal matriarchal female. In both cases, *Salomé* functions as a self-conscious postmodern construct whose self is shaped by texts and narratives.

However, when Herod is imploring her not to listen to her mother and to ask for something else than Jokanaan's head, she answers: "It is not my mother's voice that I heed. It is for mine own pleasure that I ask the head of Jokanaan". By so doing, *Salomé* breaks with the tradition she stems from, both biblical and mythological, and attempts to start a new one in which pleasure becomes a yardstick by which she defines herself for us who are invited to use it, too, in order to redefine identity and gender.

Notes Contribution issue de la conférence internationale "Translating myth", organisée les 5, 6 & 7 septembre 2013 à la galerie d'art contemporain *Firstsite*, Colchester (Royaume-Uni) par le Centre for Myth Studies à l'University of Essex.  
**Autre titre :** Oscar Wilde's *Salomé*: Towards a Redefinition of Gender through Rewriting and Performing Myths.

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