

New Literary History.

New Literary History

Volume 26, Number 2, Spring 1995

Johns Hopkins University Press



Article



[View](#)

[Save](#)

[View Citation](#)

Additional Information

Salome[©]:

The Fetishization of a Textual Corpus

Megan Becker-Leckrone — [\(bio\)](#)

I. The Salome Effect

I have been considering, under different aspects, some of the forces that make interpretation necessary and virtually impossible, and some of the constraints under which it is carried on. I have spoken of deafness and forgetfulness as properties not only of texts, but of history, and of interpreters. . . . And I have suggested that interpretation, which corrupts or transforms, begins so early in the development of narrative texts that the recovery of the real right original thing is an illusory quest.

Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy*

The Salome theme, or just “Salome,” as the narrative has come to be named by gestures motivated by more than mere efforts at shorthand, is said to originate in the Gospels and then reemerge in the nineteenth century, appropriated by European Decadence as a representative myth of eroticism, taboo, and transgression. Brian Parker asserts this characteristic critical observation in an essay in *Modern Drama*: “The centrality of the Salome motif to European painting and literature from about 1860 to the outbreak of World War I is now widely accepted. Artists and writers ‘depict [Salome] so often,’ says Philippe Jullian, ‘that the little Jewish

princess . . . may be regarded as the goddess of the Decadence.”¹ Furthermore, critics largely concur that this revival chose a natural and logical source: Mark’s and Matthew’s understated reporting of how John the Baptist met his death, they agree, is replete with decadent potentiality.

Often cited in such arguments is the famous passage from Huysmans’s *A Rebours* (Against Nature), in which protagonist Des Esseintes breathlessly exalts Salome and describes a rich symbolism, a description that is seen as setting the tone for modern treatments of the myth. For Des Esseintes, Salome is “the symbolic incarnation of undying lust, the **[End Page 239]** goddess of immortal Hysteria . . . the monstrous Beast, indifferent, irresponsible, insensible, poisoning . . . everything she touches.”² Des Esseintes’s “Salome” is, obviously, the woman rather than the story, a body rather than a text. “She” is the object of his fascination, his desire “incarnate,” his fetish.

Contemporary criticism generally seconds this assessment of “Salome,” taking the symbolism involved a step further: Salome represents Decadentism’s ideals; Des Esseintes (only the “character” of Oscar Wilde is called upon more often to play the role of famous dandy) represents the Decadent. The seductive appeal that “woman” effects on that “man” is representative of the myth’s effect on an entire artistic movement. Richard Ellmann, in his biography of Oscar Wilde, employs the trope of female seduction to describe the intertextual transmission of the Salome myth: “Salome, having danced before the imaginations of European painters and sculptors for a thousand years, in the nineteenth century turned her beguilements to literature” (*OW* 339). With a deliberate slippage between woman and text that is meant to be clever but is nevertheless not disinterested, Ellmann’s metaphor characterizes a recurring critical stance: figuring the peculiar intertextuality of the Salome story by mimicking the fetishistic gesture. Not only Decadents but also their commentators conflate character and plot, woman and text. And the fact that Ellmann’s approach is self-consciously figurative does not exonerate the gesture. Rather, it underscores what is fetishistic about his reading: that the conflation depends upon a disavowal. In “Je sais bien, mais quand même,” one of the classic essays on fetishism after Freud, Octave Mannoni argues that disavowal is a psychic economy which, importantly, does not operate in the field of literal belief.³ Rather disavowal (*Verleugnung* in Freud’s texts) operates in the field of knowledge, that is *in spite of* knowledge, to effect a sort of disingenuous belief. Mannoni’s title is a paraphrase of the fetishist’s disavowal, and it aptly describes Ellmann’s gesture. Ellmann, like Mannoni’s fetishist, *knows very well* that a story and a woman are not identical, *but just the same* he figures them as if they are.

But the logic of fetishism I would like to outline in the commentary surrounding the Salome myth goes beyond the sort of thematic figuration I describe above. Criticism’s conflation of woman and text involves a fetishism that, like Freud’s theory of infantile sexuality, is

ultimately an issue of interpretation. “Fetishism,” as Freud describes it, involves a managed relation to that “lost” object, the maternal phallus.⁴ The peculiarly “double attitude of fetishists” (218) involves a pragmatic contradiction; the fetishist “retains this belief” in the existence of the maternal phallus “at the same time he gives it up” (216). In other words, **[End Page 240]** the “fact” of female castration is managed by a disavowal—a self-consciously artificial “belief” in some past when she was not castrated, when her body was whole. That phallus she once had, always already lost, is the part for which the fetish is a substitute. It is a “penis-substitute,” a fiction of sorts which completes the body of the woman, interpreted as incomplete (214). In short, fetishism revolves around the irreducibly contradictory fiction of the maternal phallus, the thing which, despite the fact that it never really existed as such, made the woman whole in some always distant past, despite the fact that she was never really incomplete as such.

In its circularity, the irreducibly contradictory situation of Freudian fetishism is analogous to the system of logic that informs and perpetuates the textual discourse on Salome. Like Freudian fetishism, Salome criticism too operates out of a subtle and disavowing logic of deferred action and retroactive interpretation, going back into the past and reading into it a scene of seduction.⁵ For it founds itself upon a valuation of the Salome myth as a substantial, preexisting object that may be regarded as a whole before the nineteenth century ever set its sights upon it.

Criticism, reading two thousand years of cultural discourse on the Salome myth, nevertheless presupposes this intertextual dispersal as something existing somewhere as a body, an organic whole: a “textual corpus.”⁶ Criticism fetishizes this “corpus” just as persistently as it says Herod and the Decadents fetishized the body of the dancing woman.

Marjorie Garber, in her book *Vested Interests*, notes the persistent contemporary interest in this biblical myth and comments on the various uses academic discourse has found for the Salome myth, for Salome: “French writers and painters of the nineteenth century had a field day with Salome, and both feminists and deconstructive critics of the twentieth century have had a field day with them . . . Salome and her dance have become a figure for that which can—and cannot—be represented, as well as for the putative cruelty and inscrutability of Woman. . . . In its non-description, in its indescribability, lies [the story’s] power, and its availability for cultural inscription and appropriation” (VI 340–41). Garber’s observation of critical trends is apt, but it reveals her own participation in Salome’s fetishization. For she asserts the term “indescribability” as if it were identical to, or merely a subtle apposition to, the term that precedes it. But “non-description” and “indescribability” are not identical terms. Garber’s critical posture, which effaces their difference, is precisely illustrative of the disavowal I wish to

trace. It is part of the same logic of textual criticism that confuses (or pretends to confuse) a story with a woman. It moreover marks the **[End Page 241]** moment in that logic that confuses a secret (“indescribability”) with a secret-effect (“non-description”).

So what makes Salome so continuously fascinating? Why does she persist as a provocative femme fatale, even, if not especially, by “feminists and deconstructive” readers who are urgently interested in exposing the patriarchal assumptions of those who have, through both glorification and condemnation, fetishized and refetishized Salome as Woman by making her a symbol, an object? I propose that the singular charge “Salome” continuously seems to provide for discussions of fetishism, Decadentism (its authors serving as literary criticism’s fetishists par excellence), and finally Oscar Wilde himself (the man as much as the author serving as criticism’s Decadent par excellence), is fundamentally tied to the irreducibility of the myth’s textual genealogy. Playing out the analogy to Freudian fetishism, and indirectly coming to terms with the conventional notion of fetishism which surrounds the Decadent femme fatale, I will ask how a narrative has become a woman, how the gospel story has become the Salome myth, has become Salome. For I suspect that the intrigue, the mystery, the secret of that “Woman” and her enduring captivation has much to do with the labyrinthine genealogy of the narrative which characterizes her.

That is, the “secret of Salome” is a *secret-effect* of this narrative and its intertextual transmission. The gospel story, the Salome myth, Salome—the “Salome[©]Effect”—is not the essence or secret of Woman; it is a condition of narrative. I mean this distinction to offer more than the standard objection to characterological reading that a story is not the same as a person. Rather, I make it as a hypothesis for investigating the fetishistic logic which marks seemingly all textual references to Salome, and which invokes a fetishism that is far more than thematic.

The textual fetishism at work in Salome discourse, critical or otherwise, is precisely the sort of faith in the “real right original thing” which Frank Kermode, who has been speaking of the narrative of the New Testament Gospels and of the narrative effect their subsequent interpreters generate, refers to in the epigraph which heads this essay. Kermode argues that the notion of an objective referent at the foundation of the Gospels, each one somehow presenting a version of one historic reality, one “fabula,” is undermined by their intertextual constitution. The supposed core text of the Gospels is actually a situation of borrowing and rewriting and reinterpretation: “Mark is already an interpretation; Matthew and Luke are in large part interpretations of Mark.”⁷ Even the so-called historical referent of the Passion, he argues, is an intricate weave of Old Testament allusion and appropriation. This intertextuality marks the specific role these religious narratives were to hold: the purposely

multidimensional story that is at once historical **[End Page 242]** “report,” symbolic narrative, and theological interpretation (GS 114–15). Kermode explains how this narrative and/as interpretation comes about in the Gospels:

There comes a point where interpretation by the invention of new narrative is halted; in the present instance that point was reached with the establishment of a canon of four gospels. Interpretation thereafter usually continues in commentary. These interpretive continuities are illuminated, I have suggested, by the *practice of midrash*. By midrash the interpreter, either by rewriting the story or explaining it in a more acceptable sense, bridges the gap between an original and a modern audience. The word derives from darash, to probe or examine; however the work is done, *whether by fictive augmentation and change or by commentary, its object is to penetrate the surface and reveal a secret sense; to show what is concealed in what is proclaimed*.

(GS x, italics mine)

Kermode does not present this argument in order to expose gospel authority as a fraud; he points out, rather, that, as midrash, such narrative construction was rigorous institutional practice. In the proper sense of the term, midrash refers not to Christian narrative or exegesis, but specifically to a practice of rabbinical biblical interpretation and commentary. For Kermode to align the Gospels with midrash as a narrative/interpretive model is to challenge the chauvinism of Christianity’s conventional model of biblical interpretation—typology or figural interpretation—and to expose its foundations upon presuppositions of closure, wholeness, and simple, linear textual genealogy.⁸ Kermode suggests that for New Testament writers, not yet girded with the dominant cultural authority Christianity would come to have, midrash was a means of establishing authority, of creating a history-effect to the Gospels’ “witness” to the teachings of Christ.

What I find most useful in his discussion, then, is that Kermode implicates the “source” within an already existing intertextuality. Mark, he explains, appropriates, alters, alludes to previously established narrative elements, and does so not to demonstrate allusive flourish, but to assert historical authority by creating a history-effect. This argument regarding the Gospels informs my argument regarding the instrumentality of intertextuality in the Salome narrative on two levels. In a more obvious sense, Kermode’s qualifications of the Gospels’ narrative “originality,” not only among themselves, but also in regard to the “Old Testament” (itself a text named and unified as such by Christianity’s retroactive interpretation), could cast doubt on the idea of Mark or Matthew single-handedly creating “Salome,” or even that they “first reported” her real-life exploits. But more importantly, I think Kermode’s definition of “midrash” in its secularized sense—and the way in which the term serves as an explanation for the chicken-and-egg interrelation **[End Page 243]** between narrative and interpretation—provides an excellent model for critical discourse’s relationship to the Salome story.

Kermode further explains midrash as “a way of finding in an existing narrative the potential of more narrative” (GS xi). Perhaps “midrash” is narratologically analogous to what I am calling textual fetishism.⁹ In any case, I am interested in exploring “midrash” not as an ancient, exotic practice of writing but as a logic that is operative whenever the line between telling, retelling, and telling about a story is blurred; whenever interpretation, even summary, is also telling again, telling in a different way, telling more. I am interested in suggesting that this *whenever* is really always.

II. Matthew, Mark . . . and Josephus: The Real Right Original Thing?

The story of the “daughter of Herodias” dance and the subsequent beheading of John the Baptist is first written in the Gospel according to Mark (6:14–39) in A.D. 65, and soon after in Matthew (14:1–12) in approximately A.D. 75.¹⁰ Both tell the story retrospectively, or rather framed as a past-perfect reference to the past tense narrative of Christ’s life, and tell it in order to make explicit John’s role as a precursor to Christ.¹¹ Matthew, for example, makes this transition to the framed tale: “At that time Herod the tetrarch heard about the fame of Jesus; and he said to his servants, ‘This is John the Baptist, he has been raised from the dead; that is why these powers are at work in him’” (Matt. 14:1–2).¹²

Of course, criticism has widely acknowledged that the problem with looking simply to the Gospels for a clarification of Wilde’s source is that Salome is never mentioned by name. Many critics note, however, that she is named by a first-century source nearly contemporary with Matthew and Mark: Flavius Josephus’s *Antiquities of the Jews*. Here the incredibly intricate genealogy of Herod’s infamous family is laid out, and here Salome is named all over the place (through at least three generations of the family—so that, at various times, some “Salome” manages to be sister, mother, daughter, granddaughter, niece, and so on, to some equally recurring “Herod”). What is notably missing from Josephus, however, is any mention of the dance for the head. So whereas in the Gospels, we had a deed without a name, here we have a name without a deed. For modern treatments of the Salome story, to connect “Salome” *with* the story, Josephus’s text is one part without which there is no whole.

Of course, many critics indisputably point out that “Salome” becomes a fuller figure, name and more, in nineteenth-century rewritings than [End Page 244] she is in these sources. The Salome myth is certainly more often identified as a European artistic “standard tune” than it is as a stock lesson in Bible study. Anthony Pym, in “The Importance of Salomé: Approaches to a *fin de siècle* Theme,” elaborately supports this rather obvious claim with statistical evidence. He reports that Salome’s “corpus is very convincingly centered on the end of the nineteenth century: 82% of the original versions were produced between 1860 and 1920” (IS 312).¹³

Pym enhances the bland task of describing the Gospels' Salome plot by prescribing what "fulfills the minimum requirements" (that is his actual unironic terminology) for the "Salome's" thematic legacy (IS 316). He specifies with structuralist faith that

the theme enables a limited network of references to form a historical place of its own. . . . In the case of Salomé, the major presupposed reference is a singularly well-known point of departure: the Bible. The pertinent passages in the Gospels are not merely two more versions in a circular chain of reference, but function as the underlying retainers of narrative elements that, once evoked, form a stable and generally accessible unit. This biblical base in fact enables the Salomé topic to be described in the following way: four characters—John the Baptist, Herod Antipas, his second wife Herodias and her daughter whom tradition has named Salomé—are narratively interrelated in such a way that the first is ultimately beheaded at the instigation of one of the latter two. . . . A specific property of this particular theme would appear to be that the topic could not be evoked in this way if the [work employing the theme] were merely of one of the men: *a version of Salomé must focus on one or both of the women.*

(IS 312, emphasis Pym's)

Pym's discussion will go on to demonstrate his assumption that the Gospels are not only a source narrative for this "theme," but are moreover a "historical object" to which the recurring theme refers (IS 316). Yet he also evaluates this original object and concludes that, despite its privileged primacy, its subsequent retellings render it quantitatively and qualitatively unimportant. And Pym is eminently concerned with Importance. He believes firmly in the validity of measuring the "weight" (again, his term) of a text, and while the gospel narrative inspired great things from great minds, it is not in itself heavy (IS 313).

There is, however, an inherent contradiction, or disavowal, in Pym's argument. According to a pattern I will explore in all of my examples, he privileges the gospel narrative as a source, a location, a historical object—the common referent of all "Salome stories" which follow it. It is the original whole to which all later versions refer. At the same time, Pym blames this whole for its lacks, its incompleteness. The problem with this whole, he implies, is that it is not. **[End Page 245]**

It is telling that even within this supposedly original thematic entity, this "stable and generally accessible unit" he maps out, Salome is constituted retroactively, "named" by "tradition." Pym might have been more precise had he cited Josephus's first-century *Antiquities*, the text contemporaneous with the Gospels that *does* initially name Salome in the context of Herod, Herodias, and John's beheading.

But there is perhaps a reason why he did not. For despite the claim that historical text could make for establishing Salome's nominal status, the *Antiquities* ironically cannot meet Pym's "minimum requirements" for a proper Salome[©]. For John's fatal meeting with Herod involves neither a dance nor a female request for the beheading. Josephus names Salome repeatedly; there is no ambiguity that she is Herodias's daughter and Herod's stepdaughter. But she dances no dance, asks for no head, follows no requests for her mother, because her mother never asks for a head either. In fact, John's decapitation here involves no women whatsoever, rather it is wholly Herod's politically motivated doing. Josephus's would-be "Salome narrative" is a scene between two men. And that's not good enough, Pym would say, which is utterly ironic in light of that fact that what Josephus describes (an exclusively male exchange) is just what Pym values so highly. In any case, what I wish to point out here is the way in which this interpretive logic fetishizes Salome's textual genealogy. Pym insists on a whole, the constitution of which depends upon an interplay of parts whose whole he does not acknowledge.

This textual fetishism is played out on another level as well. His "Salome" is not only a substantial object, it is a feminized object that is a commodity of and for men. He fetishizes "Salome" as a "corpus," but more than that, one which is not even her own so much as that of the men who use and trade her. Tellingly, he calls the history of the myth "our original corpus" (IS 319).

Pym's possessive hold on Salome's textual body, furthermore, is not simply articulating the professorial "we." Salome might somehow embody the idea, the theme, but it is not "*her*" body. She is an essential ingredient in the theme, but is not the agent who activates it. "The simple weight and concentration of this corpus should suggest that Salomé was of some historical importance" (IS 313). But whose "corpus" is so heavy? Pym implies, with an underlying misogyny that allows him actually to exclude women as anything other than "theme" or "topic" (never as subjects, as authors, as audience) from his objectified categories ("strong," "serious," and "important") that it is not Salome "herself" who is weighty and dense, but rather the impressive fraternity of male artists who selected to use her for a theme. ¹⁴ Not an important woman, but rather important men who make the corpus important, by deeming **[End Page 246]** it worthy of their attention. Paradoxically, "The Importance of [Being] *Salomé*" is that "she" is "A Woman of No Importance." Salome "herself" has no importance, only value: Salome[©]. And her value is measurable exclusively as an object of exchange, between men. ¹⁵

In other words, Pym establishes a logic presupposing a whole, stable, and accessible origin for "our original corpus" that inscribes the very uncertainty it seeks to order out (IS 319). The "place" of her naming, according to his logic, is nevertheless not part of her "textual corpus." At the original place where Salome's corpus is supposedly grounded, we have two codependent sources; no whole, only intertextual parts on whom the idea of a whole is tacitly

founded. Pym's extensive system of value and measurement must disavow this feature of his "original corpus" and cannot account for its fundamental contradiction: that one of the intertextual parts that makes up his idea of the whole, the very standard by which all else is measured, does not itself measure up.

Pym's contradictory logic of weights and measures is perhaps asking to be exposed, because the general premise of his argument is, to put it plainly, slightly ridiculous. While the relative merits and shortcomings of structuralist reading are at least considered worthy of debate, there is no discernable consensus that a *statistical* reading of literature is ultimately useful. In that sense, he is an easy target. But what I found is that Pym's logic, while extreme, was not atypical, and, finally, not even the most problematic treatment of the Salome narrative I encountered. For if his terms are self-revealing and his approach naive, at least he literalizes a logic that many more subtle readings assert by implication.

Pym weaves Josephus into his summary by sleight-of-hand, so that he may more efficiently avoid disturbing the integrity of his Salome's "corpus." The readings I will examine next do something much stranger: they weave in Oscar Wilde, again without acknowledging the gesture, and again with a disavowing faith in some real, right, original thing, in an original textual corpus of which he becomes an anachronistic contributor.

III. Writing (about) Salome: Contemporary Midrash

I marvel at how this great wealth has made its home in this poverty.

Gospel according to Thomas ¹⁶

King Herod holds a banquet while John the Baptist is imprisoned on the king's premises. During the banquet, Herod requisitions his wife's **[End Page 247]** daughter for a dance, promising her anything she wants in return. She accepts, dances, and asks for the head of John the Baptist on a charger. Herod obeys her request and has John beheaded.

Such is the plot summary whose presentation, in some form, is de rigueur for commentary or criticism on any one of the many fictional accounts of what is called the Salome myth—commentary and criticism, that is, which feels responsible for pointing out that the nineteenth century did not invent "Salome," that someone recorded the story before Oscar Wilde wrote it or Gustave Moreau painted it. The obligatory gesture acknowledging that the Bible told it first is made persistently; it is a complicated response (whether explicit or implicit) to a responsibility to privilege the original Word.

Nearly all critical accounts go beyond my summary at least far enough to endow the dancing daughter with a name: Salome. Even strictly informational biblical scholarship tells us what to call her. For example, *Who's Who in the New Testament* acknowledges that the name is not given in the Gospels “except by implication,” but nevertheless records her information under “S”—“SALOME (Gk. from Hebrew for peaceful). . . . 2. Salome, daughter of Herodias”—and freely employs the name throughout the entry. ¹⁷

Most summaries, however, go beyond simply supplying the dancer with a name. Some also name the dance. For reasons I will address later, the two most noteworthy and problematic instances of this nomination that I came across were in self-avowedly feminist readings of the Salome myth. Indeed, Barbara Walker’s account in *The Woman’s Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets* offers the most wild and improvisational approach to textual history I encountered in seeking “information” about Salome. The supposed distinction between objective commentary and speculative criticism becomes swiftly blurred when an “encyclopedia” can provide the provocatively unconventional, but ultimately deceptive summary Walker gives:

Salome

The Bible presents the Dance of the Seven Veils as a mere vulgar striptease performed by Salome to “please Herod” (Matthew 14:6–8). Actually, the Dance of the Seven Veils was an integral part of the sacred drama, depicting the death of the surrogate-king, his descent into the underworld, and his retrieval by the Goddess, who removed one of her seven garments at each of the seven underworld gates. . . . Salome represented Ishtar as the third of her three high priestesses or “Marys.” . . . She may have been identical with the sacred harlot Mary Magdalene, or Mary of the Temple. . . . The dancing priestess was more than a trivial entertainer. Salome’s husband Joseph was killed after he lay with the queen, Mariamne or Miriam (Mary). Salome was present with the virgin **[End Page 248]** Mary—the same Mary?—at the birth of Jesus; some said she was the midwife who delivered the holy child. Salome was present with all three Marys at the death of Jesus (Mark 15:40). Obviously she was also involved in the death of John the Baptist, which seems to have been not a murder but a ritual sacrifice. . . . Though only a fragment in its present form, the story of Salome presents evidence for the survival of the Tammuz-Ishtar cult in Jerusalem, where someone periodically died in the role of the god, and the women raised the ancient lament for the victim in the temple.

(Ezekiel 8:14) ¹⁸

Walker’s mythological history is itself an intricate midrash which patches together supportable textual data with dizzying anachronism, tenuous speculation, slippery genealogy, and urgently interested feminist revisionism. Her reading depends upon a “creative”—or, less

generously, logically circular—approach to nomination. The name of the dance is crucial to the prebiblical lineage she traces, for the Ishtar narrative has nothing in common with the Salome narrative except the name of the dance. Begging the question, Walker herself provides a name for a dance that then becomes her evidence for that dance's bounding mythical legacy.

But of course, Walker did not make up the name. The “Dance of the Seven Veils” sounds familiar to those who are acquainted with the Salome story. Besides, she is not the only one to call it by that name. Another feminist reading of “Salome,” Marjorie Garber's *Vested Interests*, devotes part of one chapter to a discussion of the Salome story, and the “Dance of the Seven Veils” is again the conspicuous additional detail to a summary of the Salome story, though here presented with a scholarly sobriety Walker's account certainly lacks. Garber efficiently performs the perfunctory story-telling as follows: “Here, in brief, is the familiar Salome story. . . . Herod watches Salome dance the Dance of the Seven Veils and is enraptured, inflamed. He says he will give her anything she wants, and she asks for the head of John the Baptist on a platter. Herod is dismayed by the request, but capitulates—yields up the head. Salome takes it and gives it to her mother” (VI 340). Just as the “Dance of the Seven Veils” serves as the crucial link for Walker's intertextual history, so does it serve as the crucial symbol for Garber's reading. In an analogy Garber herself implies her reading will lift veils and reveal truth just as Salome's supposed striptease, from seven veils to none, ultimately revealed her body.

Other summaries rely equally on the dancer and the dance, if not necessarily by name, to extrapolate the symbolic truth they see as implicit in the narrative. These accounts take it upon themselves to make the implicit explicit. “Historical” accounts bring little-known details to their summaries of the narrative and its legacy. In his essay “Scandal and the Dance,” René Girard focuses exclusively on the Gospel [End Page 249] according to Mark—or rather claims he does—in order to make a highly intricate argument about Mark's decidedly unadorned mention of “the dance.” Yet, to authorize his claims, Girard lifts his narrow textual focus and provides one notably strange elaboration of the gospel story: “There is a popular legend regarding the death of Salome. She was skating on the ice and she lost her balance; her neck hit upon a sharp edge in a sheet of ice, and in the fall, her head was severed from her body.”¹⁹ Though he provides no source for this “popular legend,” it becomes the typological evidence for the truth of his esoteric interpretation, which I will not attempt to explain: “This legend confirms the association between the dance and the sacrificial death in the popular mind. . . . Being one with the intersubjective process of mimetic desire in its progress towards a sacrificial dénouement, our text is one with the dance” (323). It is even evidence, he implies, that *his* truth is somehow really “in” the original, only understated, because that folk version is essentially the layman's interpretation of that original as well. Girard states this logic with a pithy understatement of his own: “Even though he barely mentions it and above all does not

attempt to describe it, Mark says a lot” (323–24). Interestingly, Brian Parker too reports the “folk version in which she is decapitated” using Girard’s report (and only his) as his authority.

20

So what we gain from the collective information of the summaries I have surveyed is substantial: the dancer’s name, the dance’s name, lust, seduction, incest, intrigue, perversion, and startling conclusions. My own summary suddenly seems sparse. For the sake of illustration, I have been careful not to stray from the information given in the Bible narrative, retelling only what Mark and Matthew include. In neither of the “original” gospel texts do we have: a named dancer to a dance, a *named* dance, lust for John the Baptist or his head, personal motivation from Salome for the beheading, incestuous desire of Herod for Salome, Salome’s death, veils of any kind, seven of anything.

My reasons for presenting the story as such are heuristic. I do not mean to correct what I see as sloppy textual histories, nor do I aspire to offer a summary more true to the source than others. But I do construct it to provide a point of comparison to the critical treatments of the Salome myth I examine, because it highlights the aspect of incompleteness a whole discourse of critical summaries casts upon the “source” they claim to describe. Most accounts, that is, readily fill out the gospel story with particularly telling elaborations (occasionally while remarking on the dramatic “inadequacy,” thematic “lacks,” and generally “thin stuff” of its narrative substance [see *OW* 344, *IS* 312, and *VI* 340, respectively]).

These additions are not merely the fantastic embellishments of a few careless authors. Rather, they are narrative effects of the intricate **[End Page 250]** intertextuality which has not only perpetuated but actually constituted the Salome myth from the first (at least) to the twentieth century. In other words, the critics I examine do not individually improvise their summaries, but rather rely on certain standard elaborative details gleaned from several centuries of creative cultural discourse upon the Salome myth.

What is particularly interesting is that critical summaries serve to render that history of intertextuality virtually invisible. They convey a sense that the myth derives from some original whole, residing in a proper place within the Bible, existing as an objective referent, instead of as a narrative constituted out of a two-thousand-year-old game of textual telephone.

All of the explanatory details that provide a “background” to the gospel narratives are postbiblical additions, so that the “fuller” descriptions, which so many summaries offer to make up for the supposedly taciturn biblical narrative, are actually the very constitutive elements that make “whole” what critical discourse refers to as the Salome myth’s “textual corpus.” Moreover, many of these elaborations are not only nineteenth-century additions,

where Pym tells us the “weight and concentration” of that corpus was its most substantial, but fictive contributions from Oscar Wilde specifically. In some way, each of the summaries I highlight above brings in Oscar Wilde’s *Salomé* as an unacknowledged source.

Brownrigg, in his *Who’s Who*, implicates Wilde as a source when he tells how Salome comes to her end in Strauss’s opera “based on the play by Oscar Wilde.” ²¹ Perhaps he does so because in the Gospels, only the *story* ends, not the woman. Girard’s “popular legend,” and Parker’s hearsay reference to it, also appears to be a folk story which circulates chiefly not among folks but in critical texts. Because the only “source” of this “folk” version I could find was not in the *Lives of the Saints* (where some Salome falls in the Danube, but never through ice and never resulting in decapitation), but in Richard Ellmann’s synopsis of a conclusion Oscar Wilde wrote and then rejected for his play (*OW* 343). ²² And Garber and Walker, with their central focus on Salome’s dance, are also reading Wilde, though I will explain how they do so below. By a deferred action logic I am calling fetishistic, whereby Wilde’s “present” is imposed upon the biblical “past,” each of these summaries reads him into the original “corpus” of the myth, not as a notable elaborator upon it, but as an invisible, effaced creator of it.

These critics’ strange allegiance to Wilde as a source involves their disavowing position to the “original.” It seems to me that Salome criticism’s readiness to compensate for what it acknowledges as the “incompleteness” of the “original” actually disavows that very incompleteness. **[End Page 251]** And it is this peculiar role of intertextuality and its effacement that I posit as the fetishism of “Salome” (the myth, but through a concurrent disavowal, also the “woman”) which informs not only the artistic, thematic fetishism of, for example, Huysmans’s breathless exaltations of *That Woman*, but also the critical, even supposedly informational discussions of *That Story*.

IV. The Dancer from the Dance

Die Musikanten beginnen einen wilden Tanz . . . Salome noch bewegungslos . . . Salome tanzt den Tanz der sieben Schleier.

(The musicians begin a wild dance . . . Salome still motionless . . . Salome dances the Dance of the Seven Veils.)

From the score of Richard Strauss’s *Salome* ²³

In Salome criticism, what receives almost as much attention as the woman “herself” is her dance. But while seemingly offering a less problematic critical gaze than do discussions that focus on the dancer, it is in treatments of the dance that the critical rhetoric is actually its most

fetishistic, and where it is most directly dependent upon the deferred action of nineteenth-century narratives upon their “source.” And especially, it is where criticism most depends upon Oscar Wilde’s play.

I have alluded above to Marjorie Garber’s *Vested Interests* and the fact that it gives an extended reading of *Salome* based on her interpretation of the “Dance of the Seven Veils.” Her attention to the pernicious gender politics which have been the undercurrent of the *Salome* myth, if not its guiding force, is not only welcome, but sophisticated. In the context of a much larger discussion of transvestism in cultural dynamics, Garber confronts the patriarchal, Orientalist tradition of fetishizing *Salome* by outlining the disavowing logic on which it is founded. Nevertheless this reading ultimately falls back onto thematic fetishism itself.

Garber argues convincingly that the *Salome* myth provides a much more equivocal narrative than the symbolist, essentializing exaltation of “the exotic, feminized Eastern Other” allows (VI 340). Indeed, she sees the vital stakes in searching for alternatives to readings of the *Salome* myth which merely perpetuate feminine fetishization. Garber puts into political and cultural context the danger of making a woman a truth, in that it also relegates her to otherness, makes her object never subject. **[End Page 252]** Furthermore, by putting her discussion of *Salome* within a larger discussion of the ideology of orientalism, she argues that this gesture is part of a “cultural Imaginary” that is imperialist as well as sexist (VI 342).

Garber disagrees with critical treatments (Said’s for example) of Orientalism’s fascination with the dance, because they uphold that “the Otherness that produces unbounded desire is a woman” (VI 341). She compliments Joseph Boone who counters that patriarchal assumption by pointing out the homosexual subtext of such exaltations of the exotic. In the case of Flaubert, Boone “proposes to substitute a dancing boy for the dancing girl, as an equally appropriate, and more destabilizing, reading of the Orientalist impulse in Western culture” (VI 342). But Garber wants to take this reading a step further: “As politically necessary as this substitution may be, it is not sufficient in reading the riddle of *Salome* and her veils” (VI 342).

If Boone’s reading takes the flip side to the Orientalist impulse, Garber stands it on its head, offering “the substitution not of a regendered dance but of a transvestite dance . . . the dancer is neither male nor female, but rather, transvestic—that is the essence of the dance itself” (VI 342). This move, however, ultimately replaces one mystification for another, dispensing with the dancer for the dance. That dance is the truth of the “riddle,” but the riddle itself, indeed the notion that there *is* a riddle, is Garber’s interpretive creation. Positing its existence as the “essence of the dance itself,” Garber founds her reading upon a belief in the secret. The answer to the riddle is her reading: the secret unveiled, the truth. Rather than the text of his play, Garber reads a photograph to glean the “truth”—a self-consciously staged photograph of Wilde in drag, on bended knee, reaching toward a dummy’s head on a platter. Through the photo, she asserts, Oscar Wilde whispers a secret into her subtle ears attuned to the play of

transvestism. His Salome—more precisely he as Salome—is a “radical reading that tells the truth” of the ancient myth (VI 339). But just as the riddle is her own invention (allowed by her conflation of the secret with the secret-effect), so is Oscar Wilde’s truth dependent upon her own midrash of the “original story” she reads him reading.

Despite her careful criticism of interpretations that are too decidedly binary, Garber is actually quite certain where undecidability lies, essentially. Garber uncovers, “unveils” a “truth” that centuries of patriarchal textual appropriations had forgotten, neglected, a truth that gains meaning only through retroactive interpretation. There is no self-consciousness in Garber, though, that she might be reproducing the logic of the very activity she condemns in orientalist and objectifiers of women. She counters their binarism with a move toward undecidability, but only by making certain objectifications of her own. She argues in **[End Page 253]** favor of *seeming* (of which transvestism is the privileged signifier) rather than *being* so that we may move away from essentialism, so that we may recognize in fetishism the potential power of undecidability. But in doing so she asserts an essentialism of another kind. In order not to fetishize Salome “the Woman,” “the Dancer,” Garber essentializes, capitalizes (on), and, ultimately, fetishizes the dance. Undecidability for her *is* transvestism, and this *is* embodied in the dance. In doing this, she falls into precisely the logic I have been tracing: Garber accuses the “sources” of amnesia—but how can you forget something that was never there in the first place?

It is thus Garber’s *alternative* to Salome’s fetishization that is problematic: instead of fetishizing the woman, she fetishizes the dance. By still conflating character with narrative—though for Garber that character is Wilde-as-Salome rather than just Salome-the-woman—she still fetishizes Salome[©]. Garber’s argument is based upon a disavowal of the role of Wilde’s *narrative* in the “cultural Imaginary” which has sustained the Salome myth, and not just because her argument founds itself upon reading a photograph of Wilde rather than his play. With its reliance on not merely the dance, but the *name* of the dance, her argument is indeed authorized by Oscar Wilde, but in a way Garber does not acknowledge.

Let me make clear the crucial stakes of interrogating the entrance of Wilde’s narrative upon the “scene” of Salome’s textual drama. A dance might have occurred in the Gospels; it might even lend itself to the intricate network of meaning someone like Girard assigns it. *But it is Wilde himself who names that dance the “famous” dance of the seven veils.* Its appellation simply did not exist in relation to Salome’s dance before his play. The many critical accounts which slip it in for the supposed sake of making their own summaries coherent act out of a disavowal that would be analogous to identifying Alfred Hitchcock solely as a minor cameo actor in some well-known thrillers. What is “forgotten,” that is, is Oscar Wilde’s retroactive

instrumentality in the Salome myth. Because not a single Bible concordance, Saints' Lives, dictionary of symbols, or encyclopedia of mythology I consulted, ²⁴ Christian or pre-Christian, Western or nonwestern, connects that name to that dance or to that dancer.

It *does* get named before Oscar Wilde, indeed long before any of the supposed Salome sources, but in the Babylonian myth of Ishtar. Walker's *Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets* makes this ancient mythological connection, or rather refers back to the ancient "source" where the dance is named, but utterly effaces the "source" (Wilde) that allows such a textual link. Commentary on Ishtar regularly names this dance, and so do translations of the remaining Babylonian manuscripts connected to it—the familiar story of a woman going to the underworld to rescue her **[End Page 254]** beloved. If anything, subsequent retellings become the myth of Persephone or Orpheus, not Salome. That, as far as I can tell, is the narrative from which Wilde must have "plagiarized" the name. But the connection of that name to the dance done for Herod by Salome has no discernible textual history connected with the Salome myth *until* Wilde supplies it. It is his signature contribution to the practice of secular midrash (in Kermode's sense of interpretation and/as allusive appropriation) that constitutes the Salome myth.

I am not accusing Garber of not doing her homework on the history of this myth. That would be not only arrogant, but uninteresting. She knows very well that there is no named dance, indeed no named dancer in the first century sources she cites: "Though both Gospels say she danced, neither mentions the famous Dance of the Seven Veils or, indeed, characterizes the dance at all: they say only that 'the daughter of Herodias danced.' Out of this thin stuff grew up the legend" (VI 340). But just the same, she retroactively reads the named dance into that source narrative, for in the lines above this very intertextual background, Garber reconstitutes textual history with a compact introduction of authors and key terms: "Here, in brief, is the familiar Salome story as it is reported by the Jewish historian Josephus and in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark. Herod watches Salome dance the Dance of the Seven Veils and is enraptured, inflamed" (VI 340). She offers the characteristic critical summary which prepares the Salome myth with Matthew, Mark, a little Josephus, and just a hint of Wilde. Matthew and Mark provide this story. Josephus did not at all; he just provides a name. It is only the unnamed source, Wilde, who provides named dancer, story, and named dance as Garber offers it here.

This retroactive interpretation, placing the nineteenth-century dance into the past narrative, does more than simply confuse textual history. With a logic like the logic of deferred action as Freud outlines it, Garber "unveils" this narrative element of the present as if it were the repressed content of the narrative of the past. Her reading depends upon begging the question in this way; she needs it to accuse all previous Salome interpreters of "forgetting" or disavowing what Oscar Wilde remembers, but actually creates. Wilde's enigmatic Dance of the

Seven Veils, Garber reasons, “is not only a rewriting of the Salome story but a rereading of it that makes all the sense in the world—makes sense, for example, of the cultural amnesia that omits to mention that dancer’s name, or the name of her fabled dance” (VI 343). Recognizing that Wilde himself invented that name for that dance renders Garber’s claim somewhat suspect. Her accusation is a little like blaming Mark and Matthew and Josephus for neglecting to mention television.

The Dance of the Seven Veils—as Salome’s dance—is Oscar Wilde’s **[End Page 255]** invention. And the Dance of the Seven Veils[®], the “essence of . . . what was already inscribed in Salome, under the veil,” is Garber’s fetish. Rather than an object of evidence for “cultural amnesia,” the Dance[®] is the element that Garber exploits in her own “midrash” of the Salome story (VI 343). As Kermode describes this interpretive practice, her “object is to penetrate the surface and reveal a secret sense; to show what is concealed in what is proclaimed” (GS x). It is Garber who capitalizes (on) it for her reading, a reading which, like midrash, is also a rewriting. And if, as she argues, two thousand years of writers are guilty of sustaining the Salome myth through a logic of disavowal (I do not at all dispute Garber’s observation on that point), so is Garber herself.

The secret here operates within the logic of what I have been calling the secret-effect, a logic which is fundamentally fetishistic. Garber depends on the Dance of the Seven Veils for the useful metaphor of veiling and unveiling it yields her criticism: the trope of secrecy. She exploits this secrecy, but exculpates herself from the traditionally (male) fetishistic treatment of “Salome” by essentializing a dance instead of a woman. Logically, this shift only gets her so far away from the treatments of “Salome” she deplores (she means the woman, I mean the “textual corpus”). As do all the critical treatments I examine, Garber’s reading shifts the fetishism of Salome from a thematic to a rhetorical register. ²⁵

Ultimately, Garber is complicit in sustaining the fetishist’s hold upon some object’s secret, like a Herod dressed up in different theoretical vestments. She concludes her “flirtation” with Oscar Wilde’s *Salomé*—the reading is itself a kind of “tease”: she playfully reads a photograph of the author as if it were his written text—holding onto the woman’s secret/seduction trope, relying upon the play of the veil: “In the early, hopeful days when it looked as if Bernhardt could produce the play in London, before the intervention of the licenser of plays . . . , the designer Graham Robertson asked the actress whether she wanted a stand-in for the dance. Bernhardt replied equably, ‘I’m going to dance myself.’ ‘How will you do the dance of the seven veils?’ he asked, and she answered, smiling enigmatically, ‘Never you mind’” (VI 345). Garber’s implication is finally the same as Walker’s, the latter only stating it much less subtly: woman holds the secret; interpretation can unveil the secret’s true meaning. Ultimately, Garber leaves the secret with a woman, smiling her Mona Lisa smile, saying less than she means or knows: Bernhardt’s nondescription is turned into indescribability.

Perhaps it is harder to dispense with the “necessary fictions” Salome interpreters depend on than it is to cast off a veil after all (VI 343). The power of the secret, it seems, is too appealing, and too fruitful, for interpretation to give up. Garber’s reading still needs the secret, even if she shifts its embodiment from the dancer to the dance. I would suggest [End Page 256] that the slippery intertextuality of the Dance of the Seven Veils, and the unspoken way in which Wilde’s own midrashic practice gets woven into Salome’s textual corpus, is not simply a sign of weakness in Garber’s reading. The fact that the Dance of the Seven Veils yields such potent interpretation, the fact that it seems to mean much more than it says, rather, is an effect of its very place within the textual history. No more than the dancer’s, the dance’s “secret” is not reducible to truth, the source of what it means behind what it seems, because there is no one place where such a truth could be found, no real right original thing for which it stands. The myth resonates *because of* this very intertextuality. There must be something to “Salome” because we recognize “her” in so many guises (she is like Medusa, is like Judith, is like Salammbo, is like Ishtar, is like . . .). But this is not Woman veiled and unveiled again and again, this is intertextuality. Though my argument certainly cannot explain interpretation as a whole, I would suggest that my examination of the intertextuality surrounding Salome signals a dynamic within intertextuality more generally: we see so much in Salome because so many writers have seen so much in Salome, because in writing Salome, so many writers have seen “the potential for more narrative.” Perhaps Kermode’s term and his definition can save such a statement from tautology. The secret-effect is the midrashic practice which authorizes interpretation by saying “she is like . . ., she is like. . .” It is our consistent willingness to leave this practice invisible, our disavowal of overlooking it even when we see it which is fetishistic. The power of the secret still offers interpretation too much.

Megan Becker-Leckrone
University of California, Irvine

Megan Becker-Leckrone

Megan Becker-Leckrone is a doctoral candidate in the Department of English and Comparative Literature at the University of California, Irvine, where she is completing her dissertation *Aestheticism and Its Discontents: The Pathos of the Forsaken in Art for Art’s Sake*.

Footnotes

1. Brian Parker, “Strindberg’s *Miss Julie* and the Legend of Salome,” *Modern Drama*, 32 (1989), 471, brackets Parker’s. The blatant Orientalism expressed in such an appellation, and specifically that gesture’s complex connection to fetishism, is addressed by Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (New York, 1992), which I will consider below; hereafter cited in text as *VI*. The significance of a “little Jewish princess” within the Christian Gospels, and the enduring charge of

her “otherness” within Mark’s and Matthew’s redemption narratives, is, if anything, an even more complicated issue, the implications of which my discussion will address only indirectly. It is my sense that a more historically specific consideration of the Gospels’ relation to midrash could provide insight into the role of Salome (and Herod’s family more generally) was intended to play for Mark and Matthew.

2. Joris Karl Huysmans, quoted in Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde* (New York, 1988), p. 340; hereafter cited in text as *OW*.

3. Octave Mannoni, *Clefs pour l’imaginaire ou l’autre scene* (Paris, 1969).

4. Sigmund Freud, “Fetishism,” in *Sexuality and the Psychology of Love*, tr. and ed. Philip Reiff (New York, 1963); hereafter cited in text. See also “Medusa’s Head” for its discussion of the female body, castration, and fetishism, in the same volume, pp. 212–13.

5. I am referring to Freud’s theory of deferred action and the primal scene in the case of the “Wolfman.” See Sigmund Freud, “From the History of an Infantile Neurosis,” *Three Case Histories*, tr. and ed. Philip Reiff (New York, 1963), pp. 187–316.

6. Anthony Pym, “The Importance of Salomé: Approaches to a *fin de siècle* Theme,” *French Forum*, 14 (1989), 311ff.; hereafter cited in text as *IS*.

7. Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative* (Cambridge, Mass., 1979), p. x; hereafter cited in text as *GS*.

8. A recent collection of essays, *Midrash and Literature*, ed. Geoffrey H. Hartman and Sanford Budick (New Haven, 1986), further suggests the relevance such rethinking might have not only for theology but moreover for contemporary critical theory, especially in its relation to narrativity and intertextuality. Budick’s essay, “Milton and the Scene of Interpretation,” provides Auerbach’s often-cited definition of typology: “Figural interpretation establishes a connection between two events or persons, the first of which signifies not only itself but also the second, while the second encompasses or fulfills the first. . . . Only the understanding of the two persons or events is a spiritual act, but this spiritual act deals with concrete events whether past, present, or future, and not with concepts or abstractions; these are quite secondary, since promise or fulfillment are real historical events, which have either happened in the incarnation of the Word, or will happen in the second coming” (p. 199). In my own argument, I mean to suggest that Salome’s critics have some tie to this typological hermeneutic method, whether acknowledged or not.

9. I do not mean to suggest that the practice of midrash is fetishistic. Rather, it seems to me the fetishistic logic in Salome’s critics lies precisely in their (willful) misrecognition of their own enterprise; that is, approaching the textual history as if it were typological rather than midrashic.

10. C. Vincent Wilson, *The Westminster Concise Handbook for the Bible* (Philadelphia, 1979), p. 64.

11. Frank Kermode calls narrative form “intercalation,” *GS*, p. 130.

12. All quotes taken from the Revised Standard Edition.

13. Pym’s body measurements continue with tedious flourish: “72% between 1880 and 1920; only 3% date from before 1860; only 14% are located between 1920 and 1980. Similarly surprising is the extent to which original versions were produced in Paris within and immediately prior to massive

concentration around the year 1900: 65% for 1840–1860; 78% for 1860–1880; 71% for 1880–1900; then dropping to 41% for 1900–1920 and to 48% for 1920–1940” (IS, pp. 312–13). His evaluation of such data is similarly impressive: “These figures suggest that the theme first gained at least quantitative importance in Paris and was then disseminated internationally. . . . [There] is moreover a general principle of the above list: although most strong versions were produced well before the end of the nineteenth century, their zones of significance in reception effectively cover Salomé’s years of maximum repetition, and do so while avoiding the banality indexed by internal repetition itself. . . . [T]he relative absence of strong versions after the Strauss opera enables transportation analysis to reinforce the location of importance around the turn of the century” (IS, pp. 313, 315).

14. Pym offers an elaborate discussion of audience reception that is unremarkable in itself, but is ripe for psychoanalytic inquiry in the anxious, unwittingly “Medusan” drama its rhetoric betrays, especially, of course, in light of the relevance Freud’s “Medusa” has for his theory of fetishism. A fuller reading of Pym’s essay than I can provide here would certainly have something to say about the following: “The transition from an austere Herodias to an ironic Salomé closely followed the demise of the Romantic salon, traditionally dominated by aristocratic women who could do much to determine artistic careers. With the passing of the salon, the writer had only the company of his own kind . . . and was financially *forced to confront predominantly female mass readerships*. . . . Several *names of importance* participated in this *potentially frightening exercise*: the two major creators of the Modern Salomé—Mallarmé and Wilde—both edited women’s magazines” (IS, p. 319; italics mine). Names of importance, of course, are always male names for Pym. Lest his reader is unclear on that point (would Pym find me “frightening”?), he spells it out. Women are of no importance: “Of the texts in my corpus, only three are by women . . . and none of these are strong versions” (IS, p. 322). Importance is male; the important Salome is a male creation, qualitatively, exclusively.

15. It might be useful to examine further the implicit economics of Pym’s argument through not only a Freudian model, but also the Marxian model of commodity fetishism. Such a relevance is, of course, inscribed in my own title. Luce Irigaray’s essay “Women on the Market” (in *This Sex Which Is Not One*, tr. Catherine Porter [Ithaca, 1985], pp. 170–91) provides an excellent example of how those two fetishistic models might intersect. Pym’s language and logic have an uncanny echo with the patriarchal (“hom(m)osexual”) logic Irigaray critiques: “all the systems of exchange that organize patriarchal societies and all the modalities of productive work that are recognized, valued, and rewarded in these societies are men’s business. . . . The exchange of women as goods accompanies and stimulates exchanges of other ‘wealth’ among groups of men *woman has value on the market by virtue of one single quality: that of being a product of man’s ‘labor’*” (pp. 171–71, 175; italics Irigaray’s).

16. Quoted as the epigraph to the final chapter in Kermode’s *Genesis of Secrecy*.

17. Robert Brownrigg, *Who’s Who in the New Testament* (New York, 1971), p. 393.

18. Barbara G. Walker, *The Woman’s Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets* (San Francisco, 1983), pp. 885–86.

19. René Girard, “Scandal and the Dance: Salome in the Gospel of Mark,” *New Literary History*, 15 (1983), 323; hereafter cited in text.

20. Parker, “Strindberg’s *Miss Julie* and the Legend of Salome,” 474.

21. Brownrigg, *Who's Who in the New Testament*, p. 395. Another biblical “sourcebook,” saturated with moralizing embellishments, makes the same reference to Strauss, also crediting him with “acknowledging” Salome’s seductive wickedness: “The daughter was born of the Herod family on both sides and must have been brought up in the evil atmosphere of the family. We are told she excelled in sensuous dancing. . . . Richard Strauss has made more real her wickedness in his opera *Salome*” (Edith Deen, *All the Women of the Bible* [New York, 1955], pp. 185–86).

22. Sabine Baring-Gould, *The Lives of the Saints* (New York, 1987), p. 458. A ninth-century manuscript tells of two saints, Salome and Judith, who wander throughout Europe blind and miserable, the former having been exiled from her country for poisoning her husband, the latter following as a helper. There is certainly a lot to be said about why these two names get placed together as medieval saints. There is a fascinating intertextuality between the Salome and the Judith stories, extending, of course, back to the Old and New Testaments and up to those paintings of Klimt, which are alternately entitled “Salome” and “Judith.” There is also another strange twist in this story that I have not been able to follow up on yet: there is a Corona del Mar restaurant called “The Quiet Woman,” whose logo is a headless woman. (Thomas Hardy’s *Return of the Native* has the same restaurant and the same logo.) The inside of the matchbook to this restaurant explains the name and logo as deriving from the “folk story” of some “Judith” who goes through various trials before losing her head as a punishment for having done something heinous to her husband. This explanation did not provide any source for the folk story. It seems to me as well that “decapitation” is a motif whose role in the Salome/Judith intertextual history is not only thematic but moreover rhetorical in the catachresis it brings into play—all of these lopped heads seem quite ripe for analysis, especially in conjunction with rhetorical and narrative dis- and re-memberment.

23. Richard Strauss, *Salome* (Berlin, 1905), p. 137. The above is taken from the stage and music direction for the opera’s last act, “Salomes Tanz.” Strauss’s opera is the most widely cited treatment of the Salome theme which explicitly treats Oscar Wilde as a source. The opera’s libretto is a German translation of the text of Wilde’s play.

24. Except for Walker’s *Woman’s Encyclopedia*, which I will discuss below.

25. The extent to which both registers involve a “body,” or figure their respective objects as such, deserves further examination. As I mention in an earlier footnote, catachresis seems to be a useful term for discussing the connections between the thematic and rhetorical treatments of Salome’s “corpus.”

Additional Information

ISSN	1080-661X
Print ISSN	0028-6087
Launched on MUSE	1995-04-01

Open Access

No