

P E T E R C O G M A N

Wilde's *Salomé*: Tenses, Tension and Progression in Salomé's Final Monologue

Abstract: Oscar Wilde's Salomé has often been dismissed as unworthy of serious attention. This essay attempts to take the work seriously as a coherent play in which the protagonist is led, through successive stages to a moment of realization in her crucial final monologue. While this monologue has frequently been dismissed as contradictory, examination of its structure shows it to be a highly structured dramatic speech, in which a movement of revenge and vindictiveness is followed, after a moment of sudden lucidity, by the recapturing of past desire and a sense of loss. It thus functions as a recapitulation of the stages of Salomé's evolution and culminates in a sense of combined regret and achievement; Salomé's murder at Hérode's command makes sense only in this light.

The study of Wilde's *Salomé*¹ has often been sidetracked by a variety of issues: its derivative nature, its mixture of the sacred and the 'repulsive',² the temptation to read it as a coded transposition of Wilde's own sexuality.³ Like *Pelléas et Mélisande*, it is better known, not as a play, but in its operatic adaptation by Richard Strauss, itself the re-

¹ References in the text are to the bilingual edition, Oscar Wilde, *Salomé*, présentation de Pascal Aquien (Paris: Flammarion, 1993).

² *The Times*, 23 February 1893, p. 8, in *Oscar Wilde: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Karl Beckson (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), p. 133.

³ For an outline of some of these, see Joseph Donohoe, 'Distance, Desire and Death in *Salomé*', in *The Cambridge Companion to Oscar Wilde*, ed. by Peter Raby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 118-42 (pp. 127-8).

ipient of abrasive criticism: ‘a huge pile of shit [coated] with a thin layer of marzipan and icing-sugar’.⁴ I wish to treat it as a play – not, as some critics have, as ‘a long lyric poem’⁵ – in which Salomé’s final monologue is a key moment of realization and resolution before her kiss on the mouth of Iokanaan’s severed head: an act followed immediately by her death on Hérode’s orders. Critics tend to react to this monologue in two ways. It can be treated as a monolithic block dominated by a single intense emotion, such as ‘unflinching remorselessness’,⁶ or ‘like an orgasmic utterance in that orgasmic utterance has no rhetorical function’.⁷ Alternatively it is treated as ambivalent,⁸ conflicting, contradictory, when it is not just quoted (usually with omissions).⁹ But it can be read as a highly structured speech, where specific linguistic features – contrasting tenses,¹⁰ her apostrophes to Iokanaan, punctuation – indicate a succession of emotions dominated by two key moments: one of lucidity about herself by Salomé and one of decision.

It is a play, from its first drafts, in French:¹¹ Wilde wrote it in French, submitted it for suggestions to friends in Paris (initially Stuart Merrill and Adolphe Retté, subsequently Pierre Louÿs, who with Marcel Schwob and the publisher, Édouard Bailly, also checked the proofs);¹² but he accepted only those (mostly originating from Retté)

⁴ Michael Tanner, quoted by Peter Franklin, ‘Falling off the Ladder’, *Times Literary Supplement*, 14 June 1996, p. 19.

⁵ Hannah B. Lewis, ‘Salome and Elektra: Sisters or Strangers?’, *Orbis Litterarum*, 31 (1976), 125-33 (p. 128).

⁶ Donohoe, ‘Distance’, p. 121, referring to this ‘exceedingly long speech’ (p. 131).

⁷ Karl Toepfer, *The Voice of Rapture: A Symbolist System of Ecstatic Speech in Oscar Wilde’s ‘Salome’* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991), p. 152.

⁸ Peter Raby terms it ‘the most disturbing and ambivalent passage of the play’ (*Oscar Wilde* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 113).

⁹ See for instance Austen E. Quigley, ‘Realism and Symbolism in Oscar Wilde’s *Salomé*’, *Modern Drama*, 37 (1994), 84-119 (p. 116).

¹⁰ The importance of tense is briefly noted (in the English version) by David Wayne Thomas, ‘The “Strange Music” of *Salomé*: Oscar Wilde’s Rhetoric of Verbal Musicality’, *Mosaic*, 33 (2000), 13-55 (p. 34).

¹¹ See Clyde de L. Ryals, ‘Oscar Wilde’s *Salomé*’, *Notes and Queries*, 204 (February 1959), 56-57.

¹² Rodney Shewan, ‘Oscar Wilde’s *Salomé*: a critical variorum edition’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Reading, 1982) shows that the corrections attributed by Ryals to Louÿs were by Retté; Louÿs’s role was largely to eliminate Retté’s non-grammatical suggestions (pp. 31-32). The account given in *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*, ed. by Merlin Holland and Rupert Hart-Davis (London: Fourth Estate,

on spelling and grammar. Most critics however discuss not Wilde's French play, even when their focus is textual,¹³ but the English translation by Lord Alfred Douglas reworked by Wilde – we do not know to what extent – which is problematic because of its 'schoolboy faults';¹⁴ that is, as Joost Daalder has pointed out, when they are not discussing, without realizing it, an anonymous revision of Douglas/Wilde (by Robert Ross) published in 1906.¹⁵ The Douglas/Wilde translation is problematic for at least three reasons which go beyond the changes and mistranslations noted in Aquien's bilingual edition¹⁶ and by Daalder. As has often been remarked, it is excessively archaizing in an attempt to capture a Biblical (Authorized Version) tone. Wilde's French in contrast is not only simple – his debt to Maeterlinck has been often noted – but direct: Salomé's impatient 'Vous me faites attendre' (p. 69) is lost in the formal: 'You are making me wait upon your pleasure' (p. 68). Secondly, Wilde is using the Lemaître de Sacy translation of the Bible, and his characters usually address each other, whatever their status or familiarity, as 'vous', as in Sacy. (Protestant translations – J.-F. Ostervald (1724), Louis Segond (1874, 1880) – use 'tu' when addressing singular persons or things, as does the Vulgate; this is the practice adopted by Flaubert in 'Hérodias'.) But Wilde follows French usage in switching to 'tu' to express affection (Salomé always says 'tu' to Iokanaan) or contempt (when Hérode and Hérodias bicker). Wilde also uses 'tu' in Iokanaan's prophetic utterances, echoing Isaiah and Jeremiah, something found occasionally, but by no means universally, in prophecies in Sacy.¹⁷ Douglas/Wilde use 'you'

2000), p. 506, needs correction in the light of Shewan's edition.

¹³ Notably Toepfer, *Voice of Rapture*, which contains several insights but focuses exclusively on the English translation. See also Jason P. Mitchell, 'A Source Victorian or Biblical? The Integration of Biblical Diction and Symbolism in Oscar Wilde's *Salomé*', *The Victorian Newsletter*, 89 (1996), 14-18; and Heidi Hartwig, 'Dancing for an Oath: *Salomé's* Reevaluation of Word and Gesture', *Modern Drama*, 45 (2002), 23-34.

¹⁴ Wilde, *Letters*, p. 692 (to Douglas, January-March 1897).

¹⁵ See Joost Daalder, 'Which Is the Most Authoritative Early Translation of Wilde's *Salomé*?', *English Studies*, 85 (2004), 47-53, and 'Confusion and Misattribution Concerning the Two Earliest English Translations of *Salomé*', *The Oscholars*, 3:2 (2003) <http://homepages.gold.ac.uk/oscholars/> [accessed 24 November 2004]. The Ross revision spells the prophet 'Jokanaan'.

¹⁶ *Préface*, pp. 26-27.

¹⁷ Sacy sometimes uses 'tu' but more generally opts for 'vous'. Wilde consistently

generally, but switch to ‘thou’ (and archaic verbal forms: ‘hast’) not only for Iokanaan’s prophecies (because in French they use a ‘prophetic *tu*’) and other direct echoes of the Bible, such as Hérode’s promise to Salomé,¹⁸ but also whenever Wilde uses ‘tu’ for affection or contempt (which of course ‘thou hast’ does not convey). The result is incoherence in tone.

Thirdly, the English almost invariably translates a simple future, e.g. ‘Je ne danserai pas, tétrarque’, as ‘I will not dance, Tetrarch’ (pp. 127, 126). But when volition is intended, the translation *also* uses ‘I will’: ‘Je ne veux pas t’écouter’ / ‘I will not listen to thee’ (Iokanaan, pp. 83, 82). ‘Shall’ is reserved (correctly, and following AV practice) for use as a second- and third-person auxiliary when command, promise or threat are implied, notably in Iokanaan’s declarations (simple futures in the French). In consequence, in Douglas/Wilde it is impossible to distinguish, in the first person, the expression of volition from simple future, whereas these are distinct in the French.¹⁹

uses ‘tu’; both AV and Douglas/Wilde use ‘thou’: ‘Ne te réjouis point, terre de Palestine, parce que la verge de celui qui te frappait a été brisée. Car de la race du serpent il sortira un basilic, et ce qui en naîtra dévorera les oiseaux’ (p. 67); ‘Rejoice not, O land of Palestine, because the rod of him who smote thee is broken. For from the seed of the serpent shall come a basilisk, and that which is born of it shall devour the birds’ (p. 66). Wilde’s reliance on the Sacy translation is confirmed here: the verse in Isaiah 14. 29 is identical, except that Wilde substitutes ‘parce que’ for ‘de ce que’. The translation by Émile Osty (1973) unaccountably used by Aquien is very different, as are the versions of Ostervald and Segond. The Douglas/Wilde version here translates the French rather than using the AV passage, a pointer to the limitations of Wilde’s intervention.

¹⁸ ‘Oui, dansez pour moi, Salomé, et je vous donnerai tout ce que vous me demanderez, fût-ce la moitié de mon royaume’ (p. 133). The English version necessarily (in the 1890s) follows the familiar words of the AV: ‘Yes, dance for me, Salome, and whatsoever thou shalt ask of me I will give it thee, even unto the half of my kingdom’ (p. 132).

¹⁹ This use of ‘I will’ is said to be common in Irish speakers, but *The Importance of Being Earnest* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* show Wilde distinguishing ‘I will’ from ‘I shall’. Hartwig surprisingly states that her argument, based on the English text, is in no way discredited by ‘the dubious nature of the English language version’ (‘Dancing for an Oath’, p. 34, n. 1), although one point that she stresses is precisely that the play’s language is increasingly ‘infused with wilfulness’ (p. 30). Richard Howard fails to address this issue in his commendably direct translation, generally relying on contractions (‘I’ll’). In ‘Je baiserais ta bouche, Iokanaan’ and ‘Je danserai pour vous’, he translates: ‘I will’ (‘The Tragedy of Salome’, *Shenandoah*, 29 (1978), 3-38 (pp. 15, 29)), reserving ‘I shall’ for Iokanaan in prophetic mode (e.g. pp. 21, 24).

Salomé's final monologue, addressed to Iokanaan's severed head, is the longest expression of her feelings in the play: a monologue in that it is an extended speech by someone in company, it is also a soliloquy in that she takes no regard of the presence of others (Hérode and Hérodiade): as Toepfer notes, 'she speaks without any listener in mind but herself'.²⁰ However, unlike a true soliloquy it is not solely self-addressed, but addressed to Iokanaan's head. Moreover, her attitude towards Iokanaan shifts in the course of the speech; this 'tête-à-tête' (to borrow Jourde's pun)²¹ resembles an inner monologue as it represents a journey to (partial) self-discovery.

What is striking about Salomé's development until this moment is not, as some critics have asserted, that there is none;²² nor is her behaviour 'an example of enigmatic, motiveless irrationality'.²³ What is unusual is the rapidity and extreme nature of this evolution. On her entry, Salomé, chaste and aloof, fleeing from the banquet and Hérode, sets herself apart by her obstinacy. Given contradictory information about Iokanaan, hearing his 'étrange voix' offstage (p. 67), she responds first with a curiosity intensified by the fact that he is forbidden; when she sees him, she is 'instantaneously engulfed by sexual desire'.²⁴ Her triple declaration of love: for his body, his hair, his mouth, is met by three rejections; after the third she affirms confidently: 'Je baiserais ta bouche, Iokanaan', and repeats this twice again (p. 87).²⁵

²⁰ Toepfer, p. 152.

²¹ Pierre Jourde, *Alcool du silence* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1994), p. 92.

²² Hannah B. Lewis, after making the valid point that Salomé and Iokanaan 'live in separate worlds': 'There is no more real confrontation [...] than between a living person and a stone image, [...] no character development' ('Salome and Electra', p. 127).

²³ Robert C. Schweik, who stresses 'the wholly arbitrary and irrational character of her acts' ('Oscar Wilde's *Salome*, the Salome Theme in Late European Art, and a Problem of Method in Cultural History', in *Twilight of Dawn: Studies in English Literature in Transition*, ed. by O. M. Brack Jr (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1987), pp. 123-36 (p. 127)).

²⁴ William Tydeman and Steven Price, *Wilde: 'Salome'*, Plays in Production (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 8. Joseph Donohoe notes 'Salome's astonishingly rapid sexual maturation' ('*Salome* and the Wildean Art of Symbolist Theatre', *Modern Drama*, 37 (1994), 84-103 (p. 98)).

²⁵ As Katharine Worth notes, 'her obstinate repetition of the line "I will kiss thy mouth, Iokanaan," has something childish about it (the spoilt girl *will* have her way)' (*Oscar Wilde* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1983), p. 60).

Iokanaan's parting response on returning to the cistern echoes this certainty: 'Je ne veux pas te regarder. Je ne te regarderai pas' (p. 89).²⁶

Hérode enters, and from this point until the dance there is no development in Salomé, merely devices that build up tension while suspending action (bickering between the Tetrarch and Hérodiades, theological arguments, Iokanaan's ominous offstage prophecies), until Hérode's final plea to Salomé to dance leads to the rash offer which changes power relationships. Salomé sees the opportunity and traps Hérode in confirmation of his promise. After her dance, she asks for Iokanaan's head; Hérode attempts to dissuade her, but she is now decisive and implacable, impatient and angry at the delays, and ultimately orders the execution herself.

Salomé's monologue to Iokanaan's head may look at first sight similar to the other long speeches of the play: her speeches of love/contempt to Iokanaan, Hérode's attempts to make Salomé change her request. These, though also unbroken paragraphs (up to 35 lines in Aquien's edition), were essentially static: enumerations of images and examples that intensify as the speech progresses, but only to hammer home a single point (or, in the case of Salomé's speeches to Iokanaan, to switch abruptly from one extreme to the other). In contrast, the single prose paragraph of the final monologue hides its progressive structure, which my lineation and sections are intended to clarify.²⁷ With one exception each sentence is treated as a separate line. The musicality characteristic of the play (Wilde evokes in *De Profundis* 'the refrains whose recurring motifs make *Salomé* so like a piece of music and bind it together as a ballad')²⁸ should not let us overlook change, progression and abrupt changes of direction – possible, of course, in a

²⁶ The Wilde-Douglas translation collapses both sentences into the simple: 'I will not look at thee' (p. 88): given the all-purpose use of 'will', it is impossible to say which is being translated.

²⁷ The closest approach to my division and reading is by Worth (*Oscar Wilde*, pp. 69-70), using the Ross revision of Wilde/Douglas, though she sees three sections (my IA-IB-IC, IIA, IIB-IIC) and does not discuss my III. See also the analysis of the monologue as it appears (abbreviated) in Strauss's opera proposed by Craig Ayrey ('Salome's Final Monologue', in *Richard Strauss: 'Salome'*, ed. by Derrick Puffett, Cambridge Opera Handbooks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 109-30).

²⁸ Wilde, *Letters*, p. 740.

ballad. When a phrase is reprised, its sense is changed by the new context.

- IA Ah! tu n'as pas voulu me laisser baiser ta bouche, Iokanaan.
Eh bien! je la baiserais maintenant.
Je la mordrai avec mes dents comme on mord un fruit mûr.
Oui, je baiserais ta bouche, Iokanaan.
Je te l'ai dit, n'est-ce pas? je te l'ai dit.
Eh bien! je la baiserais maintenant...
- IB Mais pourquoi ne me regardes-tu pas, Iokanaan?
Tes yeux qui étaient si terribles, qui étaient si pleins de colère et de mépris,
ils sont fermés maintenant.
Pourquoi sont-ils fermés?
Ouvre tes yeux!
Soulève tes paupières, Iokanaan.
Pourquoi ne me regardes-tu pas?
As-tu peur de moi, Iokanaan, que tu ne veuilles pas me regarder?.....
Et ta langue qui était comme un serpent rouge dardant des poisons, elle ne
remue plus, elle ne dit rien maintenant, Iokanaan, cette vipère
rouge qui a vomi son venin sur moi.
C'est étrange, n'est-ce pas?
Comment se fait-il que la vipère rouge ne remue plus?.....
- IC Tu n'as pas voulu de moi, Iokanaan.
Tu m'as rejetée.
Tu m'as dit des choses infâmes.
Tu m'as traitée comme une courtisane, comme une prostituée, moi,
Salomé, fille d'Hérodiade, princesse de Judée!
Eh bien, Iokanaan, moi je vis encore, mais toi tu es mort et ta tête
m'appartient.
Je puis en faire ce que je veux.
Je puis la jeter aux chiens et aux oiseaux de l'air.
Ce que laisseront les chiens, les oiseaux de l'air le mangeront.....
- II A Ah! Iokanaan, Iokanaan, tu as été le seul homme que j'aie aimé.
Tous les autres hommes m'inspirent du dégoût.
Mais toi, tu étais beau.
Ton corps était une colonne d'ivoire sur un socle d'argent.
C'était un jardin plein de colombes et de lis d'argent.
C'était une tour d'argent ornée de boucliers d'ivoire.
Il n'y avait rien au monde d'aussi blanc que ton corps.
Il n'y avait rien au monde d'aussi noir que tes cheveux.
Dans le monde tout entier il n'y avait rien d'aussi rouge que ta bouche.
Ta voix était un encensoir qui répandait d'étranges parfums, et quand je te
regardais j'entendais une musique étrange!
- IIB Ah! pourquoi ne m'as-tu pas regardée, Iokanaan?

Derrière tes mains et tes blasphèmes tu as caché ton visage.
 Tu as mis sur tes yeux le bandeau de celui qui veut voir son Dieu.
 Eh bien, tu l'as vu, ton Dieu, Iokanaan, mais moi, moi... tu ne m'as
 jamais vue.

Si tu m'avais vue, tu m'aurais aimée.
 Moi je t'ai vue, Iokanaan, et je t'ai aimé.
 Oh! comme je t'ai aimé.
 Je t'aime encore, Iokanaan.
 Je n'aime que toi...
 J'ai soif de ta beauté.
 J'ai faim de ton corps.
 Et ni le vin, ni les fruits ne peuvent apaiser mon désir.

IIC Que ferai-je, Iokanaan, maintenant?
 Ni les fleuves ni les grandes eaux, ne pourraient éteindre ma passion.
 J'étais une Princesse, tu m'as dédaignée.
 J'étais une vierge, tu m'as déflorée.
 J'étais chaste, tu as rempli mes veines de feu...
 Ah! Ah! pourquoi ne m'as-tu pas regardée, Iokanaan?
 Si tu m'avais regardée, tu m'aurais aimée.
 Je sais bien que tu m'aurais aimée,

et le mystère de l'amour est plus grand que le mystère de la mort.
 Il ne faut regarder que l'amour.

[...]

III Ah! j'ai baisé ta bouche, Iokanaan, j'ai baisé ta bouche.
 Il y avait une âcre saveur sur tes lèvres.
 Était-ce la saveur du sang?...
 Mais peut-être, est-ce la saveur de l'amour.
 On dit que l'amour a une âcre saveur...
 Mais qu'importe? Qu'importe?
 J'ai baisé ta bouche, Iokanaan, j'ai baisé ta bouche.²⁹

The monologue divides into two sections (I and II), each made up of three subsections and each culminating in two crucial lines, followed by a coda (III) after Salomé has kissed Iokanaan's mouth. The tripar-

²⁹ Text from first edition (Paris: Librairie de l'Art indépendant, 1893), pp. 80-84, with two corrections to obvious mistakes in IA proposed by Ross (London: Methuen, 1909), p. 88: full stop to comma after 'bouche' in line 1; question mark to full stop at end of line 5. I have not followed Ross in moving the comma after 'peut-être' in III, line 4 to after 'Mais'. There are several misprints in the speech in Aquien's edition: the spelling is changed ('lys' for 'lis'), punctuation altered (notably exclamation marks after 'Eh bien!' in IA changed to commas), and a sentence omitted ('Ah! comme je t'ai aimé' in IIB); see also note 35 below.

tite internal structure of the main sections forms a final echo of the triple patterning insistent throughout the play. The first section displays a purely negative attitude to Iokanaan: Salomé expresses her confidence that she is about to achieve her revenge (IA), gloats vindictively on his impotence (IB), then contrasts his past humiliation of her with her present power (IC). Verbal repetition and punctuation mark out these subsections: the first sentence of each ends with the name of the apostrophized Iokanaan; the first and third subsections frame the second by both beginning with the phrase: 'Tu n'as pas voulu [...]'; each subsection is closed by suspension points (three in current editions, but five in the case of IB and IC in the original edition). Within each subsection a pair of contrasting tenses³⁰ reinforces the tensions that exist within it, and the development of these pairs of tenses underlines the gradual change of tone from one subsection to the next.³¹

IA is dominated by the tension between the perfect (Iokanaan's refusal, her prediction) and the future: as it did towards the end of her first confrontation with Iokanaan where it was repeated five times ('Je baiserais ta bouche, Iokanaan' (pp. 87, 87, 89, 91)), the simple future expresses total confidence, and recalls Salomé's juvenile impatience in the face of refusal, as if nothing could stop her. She repeats the identical phrase she had used then, framed with the repeated 'Eh bien! je la baiserais maintenant': she will kiss it not at some indefinite future moment, but as soon as she has finished speaking (and the translation again falls back on the all-purpose 'I will'). But the slide from 'baiserais' to 'mordrais' and the needling repetition of 'je te l'ai dit' ('I told you so' rather than the 'I said it' of Douglas/Wilde) introduces a streak of viciousness which unfolds itself in the second subsection (IB) in its contrast between the past power of his eyes and tongue and their present impotence. In this second subsection imperfect tenses are contrasted with presents: if the perfect tenses in IA referred to the moments of his refusal and her prediction, the tenses here refer to states: he was powerful and showed it, now he can do nothing. The ironic questions: 'Mais pourquoi ne me regardes-tu pas, Iokanaan?'

³⁰ Jourde, one of the few critics to comment on the range of tenses in the monologue, sees variety rather than oppositions (*Alcool*, p. 92).

³¹ Quigley acutely comments on how 'she struggles to come to terms' with the contradictions of her situation: she can kiss his mouth but not make him look at her ('Realism and Symbolism', p. 116).

(repeated), ‘Pourquoi sont-ils fermés?’, ‘As-tu peur de moi, Iokanaan?’, and the imperative which orders him to do what he cannot, both colour this subsection with sarcasm. But there is perhaps an implicit frustration here which will lead to the intensification of viciousness in the third subsection: she needs his eyes to see her victory,³² needs his tongue to acknowledge her triumph, and the unseeing, mute head constitutes an impassive defiance of her authoritative imperatives, a defiance which intensifies rather than satisfies her thirst for revenge. Thus the third subsection (IC) represents an ineluctable escalation in her negative emotions. The contrast here is between the perfect: his definitive rejection and humiliation of her, and the present: his helplessness (he is no more than a thing) set against her life and power. She now evokes the possibility, not just of humiliating him, but of a physical degradation of the head that can adequately counter-balance his verbal vilification of her (‘Tu m’as traitée comme une courtisane, comme une prostituée’).

This escalation, as she slides into the future tense (‘laisseront’, ‘mangeront’), envisaging what lies in her power (repeating ‘je puis’), prompts an abrupt change of direction. After progressing from revenge (IA) through vindictive sarcasm (IB) to an outburst of power (IC), from the direct opening through two subsections whose detail gives an edge to the negative emotion (focusing on his eyes and tongue, specifying his insults and her possible defilement of the head), comes a simple exclamation in the perfect. The volte-face is underlined by the fact that the apostrophe to Iokanaan now begins, rather than closes, the initial line of the subsection, and is repeated. Descent into an extreme of vindictiveness has led to a sudden moment of realization. As Katharine Worth notes, ‘the savagery effects a kind of catharsis’.³³

There is a parallel moment in *Phèdre* when Phèdre, having learned from Thésée of Hippolyte’s love for Aricie just when she was about to try to save Hippolyte from her husband’s anger, is plunged into a ‘jalouse rage’ (IV. 5. 1258) that leads her to exclaim: ‘Il faut perdre Aricie’ (1259), before abruptly standing back from her jealousy, which is spiralling out of control, to say: ‘Que fais-je?’ (1264),

³² The centrality and multiple values of looking in the play are a critical commonplace.

³³ Worth, *Oscar Wilde*, p. 69.

and to realize that her love for her step-son was about to make her attempt to destroy the innocent object of his love, to realize the extent of her criminal intent. Phèdre at this point is no longer addressing Œnone (she seems unaware of her presence) as she swings into a morbid abyss of guilt and self-accusation: the only person she is aware of is Minos, whom she apostrophizes (1285-1290). Similarly the presence of Iokanaan is more real to Salomé than that of Hérode or her mother. From the moment of Iokanaan's rejection, Salomé's obsession to kiss the mouth, and her remorseless pursuit of revenge had blocked out her original desire. Her visualization of the degradation of his physical head – the head that is before her – leads her suddenly to recapture that initial moment of desire.

The second, positive section of Salomé's monologue constitutes a complete reassessment of her attitude to Iokanaan. The first two lines form the transition: the perfect tenses (indicative and subjunctive) of the first line ('Ah! Iokanaan, Iokanaan, tu as été le seul homme que j'aie aimé') contrast with the present tense of the second ('Tous les autres hommes m'inspirent du dégoût'), underlining in advance the definitive loss that hangs over section II until its final lines. 'Tu étais' would have been less absolute (the Douglas/Wilde translation here – 'Thou wert the man that I loved alone among men!' – is not merely awkward in its use of 'thou' but inappropriate: 'wert' in the AV is always subjunctive, 'wast' is the form needed).³⁴

This first subsection (IIA) is one of astonished admiration, reprising the three aspects of Iokanaan that she praised during their first confrontation: body, hair, mouth, with the same colours (white, black, red),³⁵ but now adding a fourth (voice). She evokes them moreover not with the original imagery but with new images, using repeated imperfects (his beauty, her response), as she is absorbed in rapt contemplation of an unchanging moment. The beginning of the second subsection (IIB), again marked by the use of Iokanaan's name at the end of the sentence, reprises the opening line of IB, but changing the tenses: 'Mais pourquoi ne me regardes-tu pas, Iokanaan?' becomes 'Ah!

³⁴ Although some nineteenth-century writers use 'thou wert' as a literary form for the past indicative, notably Shelley, the AV uses it exclusively as past subjunctive (if-clauses, optative expressions).

³⁵ Aquien's text erroneously has 'noir' for 'rouge', and he comments in the *Préface* on its mistranslation as 'red' (p. 26).

pourquoi ne m'as tu pas regardée, Iokanaan?' Instead of the mocking 'pourquoi' and ironic questions of IB, which saw his eyes in terms of anger and contempt, the tone is now one of regret, then of achievement: initially regret at Iokanaan's mistake (hiding his face, covering his eyes, seeing his God but not her), then her achievement (seeing him, loving him). Again there is a clear contrast of tenses: the perfect expresses his error and her contrasting achievement, the desperate series of presents stresses the continuity of her love as she switches in successive lines from 'Oh! comme je t'ai aimé' to the assertion: 'Je t'aime encore, Iokanaan.'

One line of IIB stands out with two different tenses, pluperfect and past conditional: 'Si tu m'avais vue, tu m'aurais aimée.' These encapsulate what she now sees as what might have been, and anticipate the disarray of the following subsection (IIC), which shifts the emphasis to the irrevocability of her loss. In this final subsection of II, every tense used so far reappears, as if to underline her emotional chaos: future then conditional to sum up her disarray, a triple series of imperfect and perfect to sum up what he has done, initially from a negative point of view (disdain), finally (but ambiguously) positively (the passion he has aroused). Blame shifts into gratitude, but we are left uncertain as to which way we should interpret the emotional 'de-floration', as something real or self-deluding.³⁶ The irrevocability of the perfects is reinforced by the helplessness embodied in the conditional and past conditional: nothing can be done about it,³⁷ the only possibility of love lies in the might-have-been. Salomé here picks up two separate lines of IIB, reinforcing them with an extra initial 'Ah!' and 'Je sais bien que [...]':

Ah! Ah! pourquoi ne m'as-tu pas regardée, Iokanaan?
Si tu m'avais regardée, tu m'aurais aimée.
Je sais bien que tu m'aurais aimée [.]

³⁶ Aquien reads this as her illusion: 'celle [...] d'être devenue une femme soumise au désir de l'homme, c'est-à-dire d'être une femme «normale»' (Préface, p. 36).

³⁷ The past conditional tends not to support Worth's reading of the English ('If thou hadst looked at me thou hadst loved me'): 'She is still the immature girl, pathetically sure that she should be able to have her way, if only...' (Worth, *Oscar Wilde*, p. 70).

As it did at the close of section I, intensification of emotion (here anguish rather than vindictiveness) leads to a sudden change:

et le mystère de l'amour est plus grand que le mystère de la mort.
Il ne faut regarder que l'amour.

The emphasis on love ('l'amour' repeated in successive lines) and the present tense suggest a sudden release from the tension and anguish that had built up throughout section II, which opened with the realization of her past love and progressed through ecstatic admiration through regret, and an assertion of the survival of her love ('Je t'aime encore'), to an insistence on what might have been. The moment before the kiss thus shifts to the present and what *is*: it represents a rejection of reality (the death of Iokanaan, the lost opportunity), overcome by a love located now purely in the imagination. The final line before the kiss (absent from the Douglas/Wilde translation)³⁸ may seem lame, but it embodies her final resolve, her conscious choice of love over death, with the key word 'regarder'. Again a parallel can be drawn with *Phèdre*, IV.6. Phèdre is absorbed in guilt when Œnone intervenes to comfort her with the trite 'on ne peut vaincre sa destinée' (1297) and the argument that 'everyone does it'. This inept intervention spurs Phèdre to dismiss her nurse and accept control of her life: 'Va, laisse-moi le soin de mon sort déplorable' (1318). Awareness is followed by decision: Salomé's reassessment of her relationship to Iokanaan has likewise led to a definitive establishment of true priorities.

After the kiss, the coda (III) is framed by two identical lines in which the future tenses of IA: 'je baiserais ta bouche, Iokanaan,' become perfect: 'j'ai baisé ta bouche, Iokanaan, j'ai baisé ta bouche.' After the development of II, the achievement embodied in the perfect tense here is not simply that of revenge. She has done what she wanted, and what she said she would do, but has also in the course of so doing made a discovery. Initially, as Donohoe notes, 'a protagonist with a critical lack of self-knowledge',³⁹ she now attains, albeit uncer-

³⁸ The translation inserted by Ross in the 1906 edition seems inadequate, with its positioning of 'love' at the start, its Gallic use of 'one' and the blunting of the key term 'regarder': 'Love only should one consider'. Howard's freer translation is more satisfying: 'Love is the only mystery, love is the only thing to look at, prophet' (*Tragedy of Salome*, p. 37).

³⁹ Donohoe, 'Distance', p. 131.

tainly, that final moment of awareness (*anagnorisis*) essential for the tragic protagonist. If, as Donohoe notes, the first confrontation with Iokanaan was a rapid sexual awakening where the 'self-knowledge' attained was merely 'knowledge of physical passion, of bodily desire' rather than 'wisdom',⁴⁰ here she moves beyond the self-centredness of that desire ('masturbatory' for Donohoe) to an awareness of (lost) potential reciprocity. The bitter taste that *was* on Iokanaan's lips ('Il y avait [...]') gives way to two verbs in the present: 'Mais peut-être, *est-ce* la saveur de l'amour. On dit que l'amour *a* une âcre saveur...' (my emphasis).⁴¹ 'Perhaps that is what love tastes like.' But these 'reflections on the nature of love'⁴² are unresolvable. Salomé knows she cannot know it fully, hence the repeated 'qu'importe?': the only remaining but more limited certainty for her is the kiss that she has achieved. This is perhaps now not so much 'the ineffable pleasure of being granted her fondest desire' that Donohoe notes,⁴³ the kiss denied by the prophet while he lived, not just self-assertion;⁴⁴ her emotions are now coloured by the discoveries of section II: by regret, an awareness of love as a priority, but also of its problems and its limitations, and of her definitive loss. The ray of moonlight⁴⁵ that falls on her at this point fulfils several functions: it underlines this key moment; at the same time it recalls the opening of the play where the dialogue of the Page and Narraboth drew a parallel between Salomé and the moon, seen as a 'femme morte' who 'cherche des morts'; it recalls the way that the moon remains ambiguous, differently interpreted by all the characters; dramatically, it calls the attention of the departing Hérode to Salomé and prompts him to reassert male authority and re-establish order with his command: 'Tuez cette femme', for that is

⁴⁰ Donohoe, 'Willean Art', p. 98.

⁴¹ Wilde/Douglas unaccountably puts the first in the past: 'perchance it *was* the taste of love'.

⁴² Ayrey, p. 122.

⁴³ Donohoe, 'Distance', p. 133.

⁴⁴ Worth's brief comment seems inadequate: Hérode hears 'the voice of Salomé telling him that she has achieved (with what bitter irony) her desire' (*Oscar Wilde*, p. 70).

⁴⁵ The moon and its contradictory values is, as critics have often noted, one of the central motifs of the play: see Aquien, pp. 31-32.

what she has become (whereas she was 'ta fille', Hérodiad's daughter, on the previous page).⁴⁶

Such a view of the monologue may not resolve all ambiguities of character or play, which, as a Symbolist work, leaves much open; but arguably shows how its significance emerges from its structure, how markedly it differs from the other long speeches of the play, and helps define its dramatic function as the resolution of what has preceded.

⁴⁶ Cf. the suspension points in Howard's translation: 'Kill that... woman!' ('Tragedy of Salome', p. 38).