Salome Study Guide

Salome by Oscar Wilde

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Introduction

The story of the princess Salome (pronounced "Sah-loh-may"), stepdaughter of Herod, dates back to the book of Matthew in the Bible. In the original story, Salome dances for Herod's birthday feast, and he is so pleased with her dancing that he offers to give her anything she desires. Urged on by her mother, Salome requests the head of John the Baptist, and so she is responsible for the death of John. Since this first version of the story was written, many writers have retold the story of Salome. One of the most famous versions is the play *Salome* by Oscar Wilde.

Wilde wrote *Salome* in French in 1891, but the play was not produced for five years. In 1892, rehearsals for the play's first planned production began, but they were halted when the licenser of plays for the Lord Chamberlain, the British government official in charge of theater censorship, banned *Salome*, ostensibly because of an old law forbidding the depiction of Biblical characters onstage but probably also because of the play's focus on sexual passion. Wilde was so upset by *Salome's* censorship that he threatened to leave England and live in France, where he would be granted more artistic freedom.

Wilde remained in England, however, and in 1893, the play was published in French simultaneously in France and England with drawings by the artist Aubrey Beardsley, whose grotesque and even irrelevant illustrations for *Salome* have since become famous in their own right. Upon publication, the play was hailed by some as a work of genius but dismissed by many others as vulgar and unoriginal. Lord Alfred Douglas, Wilde's lover, translated the play for an English-language edition, but Wilde was so greatly dissatisfied with Douglas's work that he revised the translation extensively (the English translation is now generally considered the work of Wilde). In 1896, with Wilde already in prison, *Salome* was finally produced, but in France, not England. The play did not appear on the English stage until 1905, five years after Wilde's death.

Many critics believe Wilde's inspiration for his version of *Salome* may have been the play *La Princesse Maleine*, written in French by Belgian playwright Maurice Maeterlinck. It is known that Wilde admired Maeterlinck's work; while he was in prison, Wilde asked his friends to bring copies of his work. Like *Salome, La Princesse Maleine* focuses on a strong young woman whose passion leads to her death. Maeterlinck's play is also similar to Wilde's stylistically. *La Princesse Maleine* makes use of the repetition of words and phrases, a method that gives *Salome* its poetic quality.

In the years since Wilde wrote *Salome*, the play has been used as the basis for further work. In 1905, Richard Strauss, retaining Wilde's text, turned the play into an opera, and there have been a number of film versions. In addition, the play itself has been revived many times and continues to be produced today. Once controversial and reviled by many critics, *Salome* is now considered an important symbolic work in modern drama.

Author Biography

Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills Wilde was born in Dublin, Ireland, on October 16,1854. His father, Sir William Wilde, was an internationally-known eye and ear surgeon, and his mother, Lady Wilde, born Jane Francesca Elgee, was an Irish Nationalist who published essays, poems, and stories under the name "Speranza," meaning Hope. Wilde had an elder brother, Wills, and a younger sister, Isola, whose death at the age of nine brought Wilde lasting grief.

At ten, Wilde was sent to Portora Royal School in Ulster, where he first developed what became a lifelong love for the art and philosophy of the Greeks, and where he first became known for his eccentric manner of dress. From there he went to Trinity College, Dublin, and then to Magdalen College, Oxford University, where he continued his study of the classics and was exposed to John Ruskin and Walter Pater's theories of devotion to art. Thus began Wilde's conviction of the importance of Art for Art's sake, rather than for a greater moral purpose, and to the importance of beauty for its own sake as well.

In 1879, Wilde left Oxford for London, where he became known as a witty conversationalist and an aesthete, a person devoted to beauty. Cartoons in the British magazine *Punch* satirized Wilde's outlandish dress and his love of sunflowers and lilies. In 1880, Wilde published his first play *Vera; or the Nihilists*, and in 1881, he published *Poems*, which received mixed reviews. That same year, Wilde was invited to lecture in America, and his tour received enormous publicity. In 1883, he returned to London, then left to live and write in Paris, where he completed a second play, *The Duchess of Padua*.

On May 29, 1884, Wilde married Constance Lloyd, with whom he had two children, Cyril and Vyvyan. In 1890, Wilde published his first major literary work, the novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. In 1892, Wilde's comedy *Lady Windermere's Fan* was produced on the London stage; the play was a success with audiences but received a mixed critical reception. An attempt to have *Salome* produced that same year was thwarted by the Lord Chamberlain, who was in charge of theater censorship, ostensibly because of an old law that forbade the depiction of Biblical characters onstage. Wilde continued to write plays, and works such as *A Woman of No Importance* (1893) and *An Ideal Husband* (1895) further enhanced his reputation. *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895), generally considered Wilde's most brilliant work, met with great success, but Wilde's triumph was soon to be followed by tragedy.

Wilde had been engaging in homosexual relationships, which was against the law in Victorian England. In 1891, Wilde met Lord Alfred Douglas (who was nicknamed Bosie), and the two men became lovers. Wilde became passionately devoted to Douglas, who often acted the spoiled child. Douglas's father, the Marquess of Queensbury, was enraged by the relationship and harassed Wilde. In 1894, Queensbury left a calling card at Wilde's club with the words, "For Oscar Wilde, posing Somdon-ite," by which Queensbury meant "sodomite" or homosexual. Urged on by Douglas, Wilde sued

Queensbury for libel, but at the trial, Queensbury presented evidence of Wilde's sexual relationships with a number of young men.

Wilde dropped his suit but ignored friends' advice to leave the country and was arrested and tried. The jury could not reach a verdict, but Wilde was tried a second time and was convicted and sentenced to two years at hard labor which because of harsh prison conditions was a virtual death sentence for a man of Wilde's class.

Wilde suffered terribly in prison, where he irrevocably lost his health. He was released in 1897, but he was bankrupt and, because of the great scandal, was never permitted to see his children again. Wilde left England for France, where he lived under the pseudonym Sebastien Melmoth until his death on November 30, 1900.

Plot Summary

As *Salome* begins, the Young Syrian, the Page of Herodias, the Cappadocian, the Nubian, and a number of soldiers stand on a great terrace in the palace of Herod. It is night, and the moon is shining. Towards the back of the set, there is a large cistern in which Jokanaan, the prophet is imprisoned. The Young Syrian repeatedly speaks to the Page of how beautiful Salome is, but the Page tells the Syrian that he should not look at Salome so much, that something terrible will happen.

The two also discuss the moon. To the Page, the moon seems like a dead woman. For the Syrian, the moon is a dancing princess. The Cappodocian, the Nubian, and the soldiers discuss various beliefs about the nature of God or the gods. The first soldier says that the Hebrews worship a God that cannot be seen, and the Cappadocian sees no sense in such a belief. In his country, there are no gods left. From the cistern, Jokanaan speaks of the coming of Christ, and there is some discussion of the nature of Jokanaan's prophecies, of whether the prophet is a holy man or is only "saying ridiculous things."

Salome enters, saying she can no longer stay in the banqueting hall with Herod and Herodias. To Salome, the moon is a virgin "She has never defiled herself." Salome hears the voice of Jokanaan and says she must speak with him, that he must be taken out of the cistern. At first, all say that Jokanaan cannot be removed, but finally the Syrian is persuaded by the princess's charms to bring him forth. Jokanaan is released and begins to speak against Herodias, Salome's mother.

Salome is fascinated by the prophet. At first she tells him that his body is beautiful, but he insults her, calling her the Daughter of Babylon, telling her not to speak to him. She speaks further of his appearance, saying that his hair is terrible but that she desires his mouth. She tells him to let her kiss his mouth. He continues to insult her, and she repeatedly responds, "I will kiss thy mouth." The Syrian begs Salome to stay away from Jokanaan, but she will not listen, and he finally kills himself in despair, falling between them. Jokanaan tells Salome to seek the Son of Man, but when she continues to tell him to let her kiss his mouth, he says she is accursed and goes back into the cistern.

Herod, Herodias, and the rest of the Court enter. Herod slips in the blood of the Syrian. When he is told the Syrian has killed himself, Herod says that he is sorry but that the Syrian looked at Salome too much. Herodias repeatedly says that Herod himself looks at Salome too much. Jokanaan's voice is again heard, prophesying, and Herodias says the prophet constantly insults her and that he must be quiet. Herod says that Jokanaan is a holy man and that he has seen God. Jokanaan says that the Saviour of the World has come. When Herod assumes that the prophet refers to Caesar, two Nazarenes respond that Jokanaan refers to the Messiah, who has come and is working miracles. When told that the so-called Messiah is healing the lepers and the blind and raising the dead, Herod says that the man must be found and told that he cannot raise the dead, that the king will not permit it.

Jokanaan continues to speak against Herodias, and the queen complains to Herod, but Herod says that his marrying Herodias, who was his brother's wife, is the cause of Jokanaan's terrible words. The prophet says a terrible day will come that the moon will turn to blood. At this point Herod asks Salome to dance for him, but she refuses. He tells her that if she dances for him, he will give her anything she asks, even if it is half of his kingdom. Herodias tells Salome not to dance, but the princess says she will dance for Herod. Herod then points out that the moon has become as red as blood, as Jokanaan predicted.

Herodias implores her daughter not to dance, but Salome dances for Herod. After she has finished, Herod asks her what she wants as her reward. Salome answers that she wants the head of Jokanaan.

Herodias approves of Salome's request, but Herod is terrified. He begs Salome to ask for something else. He offers her his great emerald and fifty of his peacocks, but she repeats her request: the head of Jokanaan. Herod tells Salome that Jokanaan is a man of God and that great misfortune will come if he dies, but Salome persists. Herod finally takes the ring of death off of his finger and gives it to a soldier, who hands it to the executioner. The executioner goes down into the cistern.

Salome listens as Jokanaan is killed and wonders why the prophet does not cry out. The executioner brings forth the head of Jokanaan on a silver shield. Salome seizes the head and speaks to it, saying that now she will kiss Jokanaan's mouth; she will "bite it like a ripe fruit." Herod says that Salome has committed a great crime and demands that the torches be put out. He begins to climb the stairs as Salome continues to speak, saying that now she has kissed the mouth of Jokanaan. Herod turns toward Salome, crying, "Kill that woman!" The soldiers crush Salome.

Summary

The scene of *Salome* is set in the Palace of Herod. There are a few soldiers on a balcony overlooking an old well and a wall of green bronze. It is nighttime, yet the moon is unusually bright.

The young Syrian exclaims that he thinks the Princess Salome looks beautiful. His companion, the page of Herodias, tries to shift the young man's attention away from the Princess and towards the moon. The page announces the moon looks strange tonight, as it is so bright. He likens it to a dead woman because it is moving so slowly up towards the sky. The young Syrian however, likens the moon to a princess with feet of white doves. The page of Herodias disagrees arguing that the moon is not like a princess; rather it is like a dead woman.

Meanwhile, two soldiers are talking about the Jews below. They do not believe in the Jews' religion and their belief in a god they cannot see. The soldiers think that arguments the Jews engage in over points of religion and philosophy are foolish and unimportant.

The voice of Jokanann is heard. He is prophesying the arrival of a mighty person who will make the deaf hear, the blind see, and everyone will be happy. One of the soldiers explains that the voice belongs to Jokanann, a holy man who is imprisoned in the old well. The Tetrarch, the King, who has imprisoned him, will not allow him to be seen. One of the soldiers says that surely he will die down in the well, but the other soldier explains that the Queen's first husband spent twelve years in the well and then when he did not die, he was strangled.

Meanwhile, the young Syrian continues to watch the Princess, frequently remarking on her beauty. The Princess leaves the party and comes outside near the well. She complains out loud, to no one in particular, that the Tetrarch, her mother's husband, is looking at her in a way that a stepfather should not. The young Syrian, who has been watching the Princess all evening quickly greets her and offers her a seat. The Princess ignores him and instead remarks on the unusual looking moon.

The voice of Jokanann is heard again. The Princess wants to know whom the voice belongs to. She is told that it is Jokanann, a prophet that has been imprisoned in the well by the King. The Princess's interest is piqued; she has heard that this Jokanann has said bad things about her mother.

A slave enters to tell the Princess the Tetrarch wants her to return. The Princess ignores the slave's question and begins to ask questions about Jokanann. She asks if he is old, but is told he is young. Just then, the voice of Jokanann is heard again, which causes Salome to demand to see him. The soldiers respond to her request by telling the Princess the Tetrarch has forbidden them to let anyone meet Jokanann and thus they cannot let her see the prophet. Salome does not take the soldiers answer as the final word; she has a plan. The Princess turns to the young Syrian and begins to flirt with

him. She asks him sweetly if he would do her the favor of letting her meet Jokanann. The young Syrian refuses, but Salome persists and then he finally relents. The young Syrian orders the soldiers to remove the cover over the well.

Jokanann rises from the well and immediately says unkind things about the Queen, Salome's mother. Salome tells Jokanann that she thinks he is a horrible person and is not attractive. She explains each aspect of Jokanann that does not appeal to her. The young Syrian tries to convince Salome to go back to the feast, she should not even be meeting with Jokanann but Salome ignores him. Jokanann expresses his disinterest in speaking with the young woman before him, yet he does not know her identity.

Salome introduces herself to Jokanann. Once he realizes she is the daughter of the Queen, he tries to order her away. The young Syrian pleads for the Princess to leave but Salome again ignores him, instead she exclaims how lovely Jokanann's voice is, asking the prophet to continue to speak. Jokanann announces that he hears the wings of the angel of death but his prediction is ignored.

Salome tells Jokanann that she is in love with his body. She explains the qualities of his body that she likes and then asks to touch his body. When Jokanann refuses this request Salome reverses her opinion and tells him that she thinks his body is repulsive. Salome tells Jokanann that she is in love with his hair and explains the qualities of his hair that she likes and then asks to touch his hair. When Jokanann refuses the request Salome reverses her opinion and tells him she thinks his hair is repulsive.

Salome tells Jokanann that she is in love with his mouth and explains the qualities of his mouth that she likes and then asks to kiss his mouth; however, when Jokanann refuses the request, Salome does not reverse her opinion. Instead she promises him that she will kiss his mouth. The young Syrian tells the Princess that he cannot bear her asking such a request from Jokanann. The young Syrian kills himself. Salome ignores the young Syrian's death as she ignored him in life. She continues to ask Jokanann for a kiss. When he refuses, she again promises that she will kiss his mouth.

Meanwhile, the page of Herodias cries for the lost of his best friend, the young Syrian. One of the soldiers wants to hide his body so the Tetrarch does not see him, but another soldier tells him the King will not see the body because he is afraid of Jokanann and will not go near the well.

The King is looking for Salome, as he wants her to rejoin the party. As the King and Queen enter the scene the Queen is chastising her husband for looking at Salome as he does. The King ignores his wife and, as he continues his search for the Princess, he slips in the blood of the young Syrian. The King wants to know why the young man is dead because he did not give orders to have him killed; in fact he had just made him captain. He is told that the young Syrian had killed himself. The King voices his regret that anyone should kill himself and promptly orders the body to be removed from his sight.

The King finally notices Salome and remarks that she looks pale. He is very attentive to her and has wine brought, with the wish that she drink so that he may finish the glass. The Princess refuses the wine and the Queen protests over the amount and type of interest her husband is showing her daughter. The King ignores his wife and calls for fruit to be brought for the Princess, as he believes she may be ill. He wishes that she would take a bite so he may finish the fruit. The Princess refuses, and again the Queen states her resentment. The King tells his wife that her daughter is disrespectful and will not do as he wishes. He asks Salome to sit with him and she refuses.

Meanwhile the Jews and Nazarenes are talking about Jokanann. One of the Nazarene's tells the group that Jokanann is rumored to have seen the Messiah; however, the Jews do not believe the Messiah has come. The Nazarene disagrees and tells everyone that the Messiah has been seen curing the blind and lepers, changing water into wine, and raising people from the dead. The King hears the conversation between the Jews and Nazarenes and becomes disturbed by the idea of someone raising the dead. He orders that someone find this Messiah and tell him that he will not stand for him to raise the dead; however, he does not have a problem with the man changing water into wine or curing the blind and lepers. The voice of Jokanann is heard. He is speaking of a wanton woman. The Queen knows that he is speaking of her and tells the King to punish him; however, the King tells her that Jokanann did not use the Queens name so he will not punish the prophet.

The King turns his attention again toward Salome and asks her to dance for him. Salome refuses his request and her mother protests the request. She does not think that her daughter should dance for her husband. The King ignores his wife and continues to ask Salome to dance for him, even going so far as to order her to perform a dance. Salome refuses all of his requests, causing the King to complain to his wife that her daughter is disrespectful. The King tries another tactic and offers Salome anything she wants, that is his to give, if she will only dance for him. Salome considers his offer and finally accepts. Her mother pleads with her not to dance for her husband but Salome has made her decision.

Suddenly, the King announces it is cold outside and that he hears the beating of a winged bird. He figures the cold air is coming from the beating of the wings. Just as suddenly, the King announces he is choking and orders his mantel to be loosened, and then decides it is the garland of roses he is wearing, which is the cause of his discomfort. As the garland of roses is being removed the King likens the flowers in the garland, to fire and then, to blood. The King is rid of his distress and again turns his attention to Salome.

The Princess orders that her veils and perfumes be brought to her and she dances the dance of the seven veils. At the conclusion of the dance the King asks her what she will claim as her prize. Salome does not hesitate and asks that the head of Jokanann be brought to her on a silver charger. The King is shocked by her request, however her mother is quite proud of her daughter because Jokanann has said unkind things about her.

The King pleads with Salome to choose another reward for her dance. He wishes that she picks anything else other than the head of Jokanann and explains some of the other assets that he has that Salome could choose in order to entice her from forcing Jokanann's death. Salome refuses to change her mind and demands the head of Jokanann, as the King has given his word that he will fulfill any request she had.

The King finally orders the executioner to the well to execute Jokanann and have his head brought to Salome on a silver charger. Salome holds the charger and speaks to Jokanann's head. She tells his head that she will now have her kiss from his mouth as she had said she would. She explains that he was mean to her and said wicked things about her and her mother, but now she has had her revenge; he is now dead while she is alive.

Salome then reverses her position by telling Jokanann's head that she had loved him more than anyone else. While other men were mean, he was beautiful, and she again sings his praises regarding his body, hair, and voice. She wonders why he would not look at her.

The King watches her and tells his wife that her daughter is a monster; however the Queen is happy with her daughter's actions. As the couple leaves, when the Kings hears Salome announcing she has kissed Jokanann's lips and thinks she has tasted the bitter flavor of love, he is afraid some evil thing will happen. The King turns around and orders Salome's death, so the soldiers kill her.

Analysis

Salome is a one act, one scene play based upon the Biblical story of Salome. At the start of the play the young Syrian is so distracted by the Princess that she is the only thing on his mind. While his companion visualizes a dead woman in the moon, the young Syrian is more positive, seeing a Princess. This symbolizes the generally positive character of the young Syrian. The young Syrian is smitten with the Princess. His friend, the page of Herodias, however, is wary of what could happen if he continues to stare. This creates a foreboding feeling over the young Syrian and a level of suspense as to whether or not something bad will indeed happen to the young Syrian.

The talk among the soldiers about the Jewish people is the first instance of religion being a point of contention in the play. The theme of religion is continued, as the voice of a prophet is heard. The prophet represents religion that believes in things that can be seen. Jokanann is said to have disciples and has seen the Messiah. Another group, represented by the Jews, believes in gods that they do not see. Thus, they do not believe that the Messiah has come back to Earth.

The Princess is quickly intoxicated by Jokanann and feels she must meet him. After being denied by the soldiers the Princess uses her beauty and her knowledge that the young Syrian finds her attractive to convince him to open the well so she may meet Jokanann. This is a calculated act causing the reader to question Salome's character. It

is unknown whether or not Salome is a protagonist or antagonist. Jokanann is brought before the Princess. When Salome first sees the prophet she does not like the way he looks. Then suddenly she is enamored by his voice. Jokanann first senses the angel of death. This is an ominous warning and presents a sense of foreboding.

Salome builds upon her love for Jokanann's voice and forms a love of his body. Once she is denied her request to touch him, though, she shows her anger by reversing her opinion of his body. She does the same thing with his hair. Salome then tells him that she loves his mouth. When she is refused his request she promises that she will kiss his mouth. The reader is left to wonder how she will attempt to kiss Jokanann.

The young Syrian is so distressed that the young woman he desires wishes to kiss another man that he kills himself. The suicide is completely unexpected. It symbolizes the intense feelings that are felt by the characters. The suicide is also an example of a plot twist. Salome shows complete obsession with Jokanann and her utter lack of compassion towards the young Syrian, by ignoring his death. Salome is identified as an antagonist, causing the reader to be less sympathetic toward her character.

The fear that the King has toward Jokanann is first announced. This fear may be the reason the King has imprisoned Jokanann in the well, as the exact reason is never mentioned. This is quickly disproved as the King enters the scene with the Queen. The King does not try to hide his interest in his wife's daughter and in an effort to get closer to the Princess he brings her food and drink. The King tries many tactics to get Salome to dance for him and finally succeeds, by offering her anything of his that she wishes.

Soon after Salome agrees to dance, the King hears the beating of wings and feels a cool rush of air. The beating of the wings the King hears symbolizes the beating wings of the angel of death that Jokanann had heard earlier. The first sound of the angel of death preceded the death of the young Syrian, thus the reader can safely predict that someone will soon die.

Salome dances and then reveals her surprise; another plot twist. Salome wishes for Jokanann's head on a plate. The King again shows his fear of Jokanann and tries to convince Salome to choose another prize. Salome refuses his request. The Queen supports her daughter's choice to have Jokanann killed.

Finally, the request is fulfilled and Jokanann's head is brought on a silver platter. Salome begins talking to the decapitated head. She is at first angry with him, in the spirit of revenge. He would not have her so she had him killed. Then she reverses her position and announces her love for Jokanann and reasons that she killed him because she loved him. This way no one else can have him. The King feels that Salome has gone mad and has her killed. The beating of the wings of the angel of death has been fulfilled twice over. Both Jokanann and Salome are dead.

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Characters

A Cappadocian

The Cappadocian briefly discusses the gods with other minor characters at the beginning of the play.

First Soldier

Together with the second soldier, he refuses to bring Jokanaan forth to see. At the end of the play, both obey Herod's orders to kill Salome.

Herod Antipas

Herod Antipas is the Tetrarch of Judaea. He is the husband of Herodias and the stepfather of Salome. He is a powerful man, able to decide which of his subjects will live and which will die. He displays a complicated mix of emotions cruelty, compassion, fear, and guilt. When the Young Syrian dies, Herod tells Herodias that the Syrian was the son of a king, and that Herod himself drove the Syrian's father from his kingdom and made his queen a slave. Yet, seemingly because of his feelings of guilt, Herod says he considered the Young Syrian a "guest" and made him a captain. Similarly, Herod took his queen Herodias from his own brother; thus Herod's marriage is incestuous. Herod expresses guilt over this, but as with his other abuses of power, Herod does not act on his feelings of remorse, and there is no indication that he will refrain from such wrongdoing in the future. In fact, Herod clearly exhibits incestuous feelings toward Salome, his own stepdaughter.

Herod continually states that he does not kill Jokanaan, although he has imprisoned him, because Jokanaan is a prophet, a man of God, but it is evident that Herod's feelings of guilt and his fear of Jokanaan affect his decision. When Herod's lust for Salome leads him to offer her anything in exchange for her dancing for him, he acts recklessly, and so must have the Prophet killed for Salome. Although it is he who finally orders Jokanaan's death, Herod's guilt turns to rage at Salome, and so he has her killed essentially because of his own actions.

Herodias

Herodias is the wife of Herod and the mother of Salome. She was previously the wife of Herod's brother, and so her marriage to Herod is considered incestuous. Jokanaan continually speaks against her, and she is angry that Herod does nothing to silence the prophet. She also complains that Herod looks at Salome too much and says that Salome should not dance for Herod. When Salome asks for the head of Jokanaan,

Herodias believes that Salome does so for love of her mother. Herodias is pleased with Salome's request and pressures Herod to have the prophet executed.

Jews

The Jews argue that Jokanaan is not the prophet Elias and that Jesus is not the Messiah.

Jokanaan

Jokanaan, or John the Baptist, is a Christian prophet. He has been imprisoned by Herod, and, for much of the play, he exists as a disembodied voice coming from the cistern onstage. He speaks continually of the coming of Jesus, whom he believes to be the Messiah, and the punishment awaiting those who do evil. For Jokanaan, the members of Herod's family are accursed, and he calls Salome the "Daughter of Sodom." Salome wants Jokanaan to see her as a woman and to kiss her, but he speaks only of her evil, thus angering her. Herodias wants Herod to have Jokanaan killed, but Herod believes Jokanaan has seen God, and he fears Jokanaan's terrible prophecies. Jokanaan seems to believe his only purpose in the world is to act as the voice of God, and he seems devoid of human emotion. Even when he is executed, he does not struggle, beg for his life, or even cry out; in fact, he makes no sound at all.

Naaman

Naaman is the executioner who kills Jokanaan and brings his head to Salome on a silver shield.

Nazarenes

The Nazarenes believe that Jokanaan is the prophet Elias and that Jesus is the Messiah. They speak of the miracles Jesus performs.

Nubian

The Nubian discusses the gods with other minor characters at the beginning of the play.

Page

The Page of Herodias is a friend of the Young Syrian and advises him not to look at Salome so much. There is some suggestion that he is in love with the Young Syrian.

Salome

Salome, the title character of the play, is a princess, the daughter of Herodias and the stepdaughter of Herod. She expects to live according to her own desires and is not afraid to disobey Herod. She convinces the Young Syrian to bring her Jokanaan, though Herod has forbidden anyone to see him. She desires Jokanaan sexually and initially speaks admirably of his appearance. When he rebukes her, however, she says that his body is hideous and that his hair is horrible. She still admires, however, the redness of Jokanaan's lips and repeatedly tells him, not that she wants to kiss his mouth but that she will, assuming that she will finally have her desires satisfied.

Salome initially refuses to dance for Herod but changes her mind when he says he will give her anything. Upon finishing her dance, she demands the head of Jokanaan, ignoring Herod's plea that she ask for something else. Upon receiving the prophet's head, she kisses his mouth, proving that she has power over Jokanaan, that even though he calls her evil, she can take his life. Her victory, however, is short-lived, for Herod has more power than she and thus can have her killed.

Second Soldier

Together with the first soldier, he refuses to bring Jokanaan forth to see Salome. At the end of the play, both obey Herod's order to kill Salome.

Slave

The slave tells Salome that Herod wishes her to return to the feast.

Tigellinus

Tigellinus is a young Roman. When Jokanaan speaks of the "Saviour of the World," Tigellinus tells Herod that that is one of Caesar's titles

The Young Syrian

The Young Syrian is the Captain of the Guard. He comes from a royal family, but Herod drove his father from his kingdom and made his mother a slave. He seems to be in love with Salome, and it appears that the Page of Herodias may be in love with him. The Young Syrian advises Salome not to speak to the prophet but finally gives in to her demands and brings Jokanaan to speak with her. When Salome insists that she wants to kiss Jokanaan, the Young Syrian kills himself.

Themes

Religious Beliefs

A number of kinds of religions pagan, Jewish, and Christian are represented in *Salome*. From the beginning of the play, the nature of God or the gods is a subject of dispute. The pagans believe in numerous gods, but their gods are dissatisfying to them. The Nubian describes the gods of his country as "fond of blood." His countrymen sacrifice fifty young men and one hundred maidens twice a year, but the Nubian says that even this is not enough for the gods of his country, whom he describes as "very harsh to us." The Cappodocian says that he has sought the gods of his country in the mountains, where they are said to have been driven by the Romans, but that the gods are not there. The Cappodocian therefore concludes that the gods of his country must be dead. Thus the religions of the pagans in the play are no longer valid for them. Yet they retain their beliefs, and when they are told that the Jews worship a god who cannot be seen, they do not think that the existence of such a god is possible. The Cappadocian describes the beliefs of the Jews as "altogether ridiculous."

While Wilde is not critical of the concept of a God that can't be seen, the religion of the Jews is not satisfactory either. The Jews of the play are a divided people. The second soldier says of the Jews' arguing, "They are always like that. They are disputing their religion." The Pharisees insist that angels exist, while the Sadducees are equally insistent that they do not. One Jew says that no one has seen God since the prophet Elias, while a second argues that even Elias may not have seen God, and a third states that "God is at no time hidden." The Jews agree on only one thing they want Jokanaan released to them, but the implication is that the Jews will harm Jokanaan, whom most of Wilde's audience would consider a prophet of God.

In considering Wilde's depiction of the Jews, it is important to remember the social context of the play. Wilde wrote at a time when and in a country where Jews were second-class citizens, marginalized in Victorian culture, often hated and feared, and at times called "Christ-killers" because many Christians blamed the Jews for the crucifixion of Jesus. It should also be noted, however, that in the play, Wilde's Jews are not evil and that Wilde is not necessarily critical of the Jewish religion but of those who have turned their religious beliefs into a series of arguments about seemingly trivial issues. In either case, Judaism, as presented in the play, is not a sustaining meaningful religion.

This, of course, leaves Christianity, and it may at first appear that it is this religion, the religion of most of his contemporaries, that Wilde supports. The Nazarenes speak of Jesus healing the lepers and the blind and raising the dead. In addition, the representative of Christianity in the play is Jokanaan, whose prophecies of destruction in the palace of Herod do come true. The Christianity of Jokanaan, however, is angry and hateful. He promises redemption to those who follow Jesus, but most of his preaching is of punishment and the evil of those around him.

It is Salome who points out the missing element in Jokanaan's Christianity in a statement that seems to veer away from her previous focus on sexual desire. Speaking to the head of Jokanaan, she says, "If thou hadst looked at me thou hadst loved me. Well I know that thou wouldst have loved me, and the mystery of love is greater than the mystery of death. Love only should one consider." It is Salome, just before her death, who is able to transcend the particulars of various religions, none of which, as presented in Wilde's play, seem to present a meaningful answer to the question of the nature of God.

Sexual Desire

In many Christian traditions, sexual desire is seen as a source of evil. Lust, sexual desire without love, is even one of the seven deadly sins. But Western traditions regarding the evil of sexual desire do not treat male and female desire equally. Historically, female sexual desire has often been seen as more suspect than that of the male. Traditionally, a woman is not really supposed to have sexual desires of her own, but to satisfy the sexual needs of her husband. Women have often been dichotomized as either good girls or bad, virgins or whores. In *Salome*, sexual desire seems to be, at least to some extent, evil, but the sexual desires of the women are treated much more harshly than those of the men.

In the play, Jokanaan is the primary spokesperson against the evil of sexual sin. His focus through most of the play is on Herodias, whom he says will be punished for evil. He describes Herodias as "she who gave herself to the Captains of Assyria" and "she who hath given herself to the young men of Egypt." "Bid her rise up from the bed of her abominations from the bed of her incestuousness," he commands. The marriage of Herodias and Herod, her husband's brother, is indeed considered incestuous, but only Herodias is called to task for the their sexual sin.

In the time period in which the play takes place, women were severely punished for adultery, but their male partners received no such punishment. Such an attitude is reflected in the words of Jokanaan. Herod expresses guilt over his marriage to Herodias, and he is afraid of a supernatural punishment. Yet when Herodias at the end of the play says that she approves of Salome's actions, Herod replies, "There speaks the incestuous wife." Like Jokanaan, he seems to blame Herodias for the evil he believes will come of their marriage.

While Herodias seems to be blamed for her marriage and for other possible sexual indiscretions as well, it is Salome who is truly punished for her sexual desires. Herod and the Young Syrian gaze at Salome to the point that it is noticed by other characters and that does seem unacceptable within the context of the play, but Salome's expression of sexual desire is extremely blatant. She looks at Jokanaan's body and longs to touch his skin, his hair. She says again and again that she will kiss his mouth. The more he rebukes her, the more she seems to desire him.

Salome's intense desire for Jokanaan is unmistakably evil, as she turns to violence to satisfy her needs. After having the object of her desire executed, she says she will not just kiss his mouth but bite it "as one bites a ripe fruit." The play suggests that hidden beneath female sexual desire is the desire to overcome and to destroy. And Wilde, although he often wrote of women who were wrongly accused of immorality, chose the ultimate punishment for Salome's violent sexual desires. Her insistence on the satisfaction of those desires leads to her destruction.

It is true that Herod and the Young Syrian are both punished for their desire for Salome. Herod suffers the death of Jokanaan, and the Syrian commits suicide when his desire for Salome leads him to give in to her wish to see Jokanaan. But their desire for Salome is portrayed as much more innocuous. Both only gaze at Salome. It even seems as if the Syrian may love her, for he obeys Salome when she says that she may smile at him, beneath her veil, when she passes by. Their desire for her is neither as blatant nor as violent as her desire for Jokanaan, and their punishment is not as severe.

There is a hint of another, possibly sexual, relationship in *Salome*, which does have its basis in love. This is the "friendship" between the Young Syrian and the Page of Herodias. When the Syrian kills himself, the Page's speech about his relationship with the Syrian seems to reveal a deep relationship between the two: "He has slain himself who was my friend. I gave him a little box of perfumes and ear-rings wrought in silver, and now he has killed himself . .. why did I not hide him from the moon?" Here the Page shows love for the Syrian, but the possible sexual nature of the relationship is unclear.

If Wilde meant the relationship to be homosexual in nature, he could not have made that explicit in the text at the time, so Wilde's purpose here can never be known for sure. It is interesting to note, however, that the one relationship in the text that seems to be based on real love is that between two men. Considering that Wilde was involved in a relationship with Lord Alfred Douglas at the time, it is quite possible that the relationship between the Syrian and the Page reflects that between Douglas and the playwright. In that case, true love is distinctly separate from the evil of female sexual desire.

Style

Protagonist

The principal character of a play is called the protagonist. It is he or she around whom the play mostly revolves. Often, readers assume that the protagonist of *Salome* is the princess. She is, after all, the title character, and the play focuses to a great extent on her actions and the results of her actions. Her desire for Jokanaan is central to the story. The identity of the protagonist, however, is not always as clear as one would think. When asked, Wilde himself said, though probably in jest, that the principal character in *Salome* is the moon. It is true that the moon is an important part of the play, and it is not static the appearance of the moon changes throughout the play, so one could argue that it is not an entirely inanimate object. Still, it seems difficult to offer much support for Wilde's statement. What is certainly worth examination, however, is the possibility that Herod, as some critics have argued, is *Salome's* true protagonist.

In many ways Herod resembles the traditional tragic hero of classical literature, whose fatal flaw, in this case his desire for Salome, leads to his downfall. Herod's character is complex, arguably more so than Salome's, and the large percentage of the lines in the play that are Herod's focus audience attention on him.

But such arguments for Herod as protagonist still do not negate the arguments that could be made in favor of Salome having that role. The reader of the text of *Salome* could certainly see either character as the protagonist. For a production of Salome to work, however, the director would have to make a definite decision as to whether the protagonist is Salome or Herod, and that decision would serve to focus the play's direction. More audience attention could be directed toward one character or the other. If the production were successful, the director's decision about the identity of the protagonist would be clear to the audience.

Lyrical Theater

Salome is often described as a lyrical work, in other words, a play that reads similar to a poem. There are a number of poetic aspects to *Salome*. Perhaps the most obvious is Wilde's use of poetic imagery and language, which is particularly evident in the characters' description of the moon. The Young Syrian says that the moon is "like a little princess who wears a yellow veil, and whose feet are of silver.... You would fancy she was dancing." Herod says of the moon, "The clouds are seeking to hide her nakedness."

The use of imagery and poetic language is also notable in Salome's description of Jokanaan: "Thy mouth is like a band of scarlet on a tower of ivory. It is like a pomegranate cut with a knife of ivory." Repetition is also common in poetry, whether it be repetition of symbols, as in the recurring descriptions of the moon, or the repetition of

words, as when Salome repeatedly says to Jokanaan, "I will kiss thy mouth." In addition, the use of music in a production would contribute to the lyrical nature of the play. Such music could be used throughout, as there are frequent references to the feast offstage, which could certainly involve music. In addition, a production could make much use of music when Salome dances the dance of the seven veils for Herod. The motion of the dance would contribute to the lyrical feel of the play as well.

Symbolism

In literature, a symbol stands for something other than itself. Symbols are used throughout the play, but perhaps the most obvious symbol in Salome is the moon. Each character sees the moon as something different. At times it seems to stand for variations of the character's visions of the nature of Salome. The Young Syrian, who admires Salome, sees the moon as a dancing princess. The Page of Herodias, concerned that the Syrian's desire for Salome will lead to his destruction, says that the moon resembles a dead woman. For Salome herself, the moon is a virgin, undefiled by men. For Herod, who lusts after Salome, the moon is a naked, drunken woman. In addition, the moon is the traditional symbol of the Greek goddess Artemis or Diana, a strong and independent virgin who demanded chastity from both male and female followers. Jokanaan predicts that the moon will turn to blood, and it does turn red, symbolizing the destruction of both Jokanaan and Salome.

Another symbolic element of *Salome* lies in the use of color. The colors red, white, and black are used repeatedly. Red is used for wine, blood, and the mouth of Jokanaan, and seems to indicate a connection between passion and violence. White is used for the feet of Salome and the body of Jokanaan. It can indicate the innocence and purity or be the color of a lifeless body. Black often symbolizes death as well. Jokanaan's hair is black, and at the end of the play, "a great black cloud crosses the moon and conceals it completely." Black, like red, seems to indicate destruction. A number of other colors in the play may be seen as symbolic as well.

In the late-nineteenth century, symbolism came to mean not just the use of single symbols but a particular art form, a reaction against the realism that predominated on stage. Playwright Maurice Maeterlinck, whom Wilde admired and whose work seems to have provided some of the inspiration for *Salome*, is largely credited with bringing symbolism into theater. *Salome* is considered by many critics to be an important symbolist work.

Historical Context

The 1890s in Britain were a time of changing values, a time when traditional conceptions of the world were being called into question. One of the major issues of the day revolved around what was called "the woman question" the debate over a woman's place in society. "The Angel in the House," a popular Victorian poem later made famous in an essay by Virginia Woolf, presented the perfect woman as one who always sacrificed her own comfort for the sake of others, whose major purpose in life was to care for her home and family, who deferred to her husband at all times, and who had no desires, sexual or otherwise, of her own.

It was also at this time, however, that the term "new woman," probably coined in 1894, came into prominence. The new woman was a member of a more liberated generation. She sought suffrage (the right to vote) for women, which was not achieved in Britain until 1926. She also believed in education for women and the end of the sexual double standard, which allowed men considerable sexual freedom, while insisting that women remain chaste until marriage. Wilde's character Salome could hardly be more directly opposed to the concept of "The Angel in the House." She seeks power over men and has strong sexual desires of her own. Salome, however, is punished for her transgressions with death, and her punishment resembles that of women presented in some Victorian novels, in which virtuous women are rewarded and the putative immoral women are destroyed.

In contemporary society, it is common to assume that such novels are representative of Victorian society as a whole. The Victorian period, however, was in reality much more complicated. Although Wilde's homosexual acts resulted in his imprisonment and almost complete public ostracism, there seem to have also been a fair number of homosexual men who were more successful at concealing the nature of their sexual identities. The 1890s were also the time of the phenomenon of Decadence, an artistic movement began in France and embraced by Wilde as well as other English artists, whose adherents sought to question Victorian respectability with work that was at time overtly sexual and indulged in the depiction of general excess. It should be noted, however, that a backlash against Decadence followed Wilde's trial.

In Victorian England, Christianity predominated. Adherents of other religions, such as Judaism, suffered suspicion and persecution. Nonetheless, Christianity lost some of the influence it had in earlier times. The publication in 1859 of Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species*, in which he presented his theories of natural selection and evolution, shocked and angered Victorians because it called into question the belief that humans were created by God. For the Victorian, such scientific progress seemed at times to threaten religious beliefs. Fears of such a threat were not entirely unfounded. The late-nineteenth century also saw arise in agnosticism, a term coined by Thomas Huxley in 1869 to represent the belief that it was impossible to know if God even existed.

Another changing area in Britain at the time involved the structure of the society itself. Previously, the poor and powerless had been blamed for their lot, but some were

beginning to see poverty as the result, not of laziness, but of a lack of appropriate employment. The government began to take more responsibility for the problems of the poor. Nonetheless, great gaps between the rich and the poor, the powerful and the powerless, continued to exist.

Salome was written at a time when British culture was undergoing great changes, and in some ways the play seems representative of those changes. *Salome* raises the issues of the status of women, of sexuality and morality, of the meaning of religious belief, of wealth and power. Wilde's portrayal of such issues shocked and angered many of his contemporaries, but others embraced his ideas.

Critical Overview

From its beginnings, *Salome* was a controversial play, criticized for its perceived immorality. In a sense, the earliest criticism of the play was in the censorship of its first planned production. Rehearsals had begun in June, 1892, at the Palace Theatre in London but were terminated when the government-appointed censor of theatrical productions banned *Salome* from the stage, officially because of an obscure British law forbidding the onstage depiction of Biblical characters though it is speculated that the play's focus on blatantly sexual issues was another reason. The general public was not exposed to *Salome* until 1892, when the manuscript was published in book form in both London and Paris.

Early critics of the text version of *Salome* were primarily concerned with its perceived immorality. Reflecting widely-held moral ideals of the Victorian period, an anonymous reviewer for the London *Times*, quoted in Karl Beckson' s book *Oscar Wilde: The Critical Heritage*, called the play "an arrangement in blood and ferocity, morbid, *bizarre*, repulsive, and very offensive in its adaptation of scriptural phraseology to situations the reverse of sacred." Another anonymous reviewer quoted by Beckson, this one working for the *Pall Mall Gazette*, also argued that the play was offensive, saying of the banning of *Salome* from the British stage, "it would be hard to see how the Examiner of Plays could have acted otherwise" and further noting that "the creeds of an Empire are not toys to be trifled with by any seeker after notoriety."

The reviewer's primary focus, however, was not on the supposed immorality of the play but what he believed to be Wilde's lack of originality. According to this reviewer, *Salome* relies too heavily on the works of other writers. "She is the daughter of too many fathers," he wrote. "Her bones want strength, her flesh wants vitality, her blood is polluted. There is no pulse of passion in her." Wilde, according to this reviewer, "has shown, not for the first time, that he can mimic, where he might have shown for the first time that he could create."

In contrast, critic William Archer, also quoted by Beckson, argued that the censorship of *Salome* "was perfectly ridiculous" and also stated that Wilde's play was superior to those of the writers he was accused of mimicking. "There is far more depth in Mr. Wilde's work," Archer wrote. "His characters are men and women, not filmy shapes of mist and moonshine. . . . His palette ... is infinitely richer."

Salome was not actually produced in England until 1905, five years after Wilde's death. Even then, accusations of immorality continued to dog the play. Of a 1918 production, G. E. Morrison, writing for the *Morning Post* (and quoted by Philip Hoare in *Oscar Wilde's Last Stand*) called *Salome* "a bizarre melodrama of disease," and added, "One may admit its atmosphere though it is an atmosphere people who are healthy and desire to remain so would do well to keep out of." Also quoted by Hoare, Bernard Weller, writing for the *Stage*, described the play as "a very impure work" and said that *Salome's* atmosphere was "charged with a sickly voluptuousness." For Weller, the play's supposed immorality could not be separated from its art: "this kind of stuff has no

relationship to art." "It is animalism, or worse; for animals have their decencies." But even as art, Weller considered the play a failure and used the review as an opportunity to fault Wilde in general, stating that "the late Oscar Wilde, though an adroit writer of showy, insincere comedies of modern society, had no perception of tragedy."

As moral standards changed in the twentieth century, *Salome's* "purity" became less of an issue, though some scribes have found the play problematic for other reasons. After discussing the lyrical nature of *Salome*, critic Peter Raby, in his 1988 book *Oscar Wilde*, called *Salome* "a work which attracted vilification, and which almost invites ridicule." The play, according to Raby, is not easy to stage successfully: "It demands a particular style of speech and movement, and an exquisite sensitivity of design." But Raby still considered the play an achievement, especially when one considers the time period in which it was written. "It is remarkable," the critic wrote, "that Wilde... could create a truly modern symbolist drama within a theatrical and social context of such pronounced hostility." In a sense, the play was greeted with such harsh criticism because Wilde was a man ahead of his time.

Katherine Worth, in her 1983 book *Oscar Wilde*, seemed to concur, calling *Salome* "the first triumphant demonstration of the symbolist doctrine of total theatre." Like Raby, she saw Wilde as ahead of his time, anticipating a direction that modern theater would take. Many would agree with Worth, who noted that *Salome* "remains Wilde's master work in the symbolic mode."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Cross is a Ph.D. candidate specializing in modern drama. In this essay she discusses the connections between love, sexual desire, and power in Wilde's play.

On July 7, 1896, while Wilde was imprisoned in Reading Gaol, thirty-year-old Thomas Wooldridge, a trooper in the Royal Guards, was hanged for the murder of his twenty-three-year-old wife, of whom he was jealous. Wilde was greatly troubled by Wooldridge' s death, and the execution became the basis for the poem, "The Ballad of Reading Gaol," in which Wilde proposes that the emotions that led to Wooldridge's crime are, in fact universal:

Yet each man kills the thing he loves, / By each let this be heard, / Some do it with a bitter look / Some with a flattering word. / The coward does it with a kiss, / The brave man with a sword!

In "The Ballad of Reading Gaol," love is intertwined with violence, inseparable from destruction.

In *Salome*, both Salome and Herod kill the thing they love or desire. Further on in "The Ballad of Reading Gaol," Wilde makes the connection between love and desire clear when he mentions various ways that people kill those they love, one of which seems particularly appropriate to *Salome*: "Some strangle with the hands of Lust." In other words, some kill the thing they love with their desire. Critic Norbert Kohl, in his book, *Oscar Wilde: The Works of a Conformist Rebel*, wrote of such desire in Salome, "Sex is the motivating force behind all the main characters but one," and in fact, sexual desire is the most obvious explanation for the behavior of *Salome* and Herod.

It seems, however, that another motivating factor is at work in the play. When Jokanaan refuses Salome's sexual advances, he is depriving her of much more than the satisfaction of her sexual desires. By rebuking Salome for her desire, he denies her power over him. Similarly, when Salome seems to give in to Herod's passion by dancing for him but then refuses his entreaties to spare Jokanaan's life, she shows that she does not reciprocate Herod's desire, that she only sought to gain something from him, and thus denies him power over her as well. It is this struggle for power, fought on the battlefield of sexual desire, that leads Salome and Herod to kill the thing they love.

From the beginning of the play, Salome is established as a woman who is both desirable and dangerous. The play's first line, in fact, focuses on her appearance, as the Young Syrian remarks, "How beautiful is the Princess Salome tonight." As the play progresses, the Syrian continues to comment on Salome's beauty, and the Page of Herodias becomes alarmed. "You must not look at her," he says. "Something terrible may happen." When Salome comes onstage, she is again established as an object of desire, specifically Herod's desire, as she asks, "Why does the Tetrarch look at me.... It is strange that the husband of my mother looks at me like that." Salome is distressed by

Herod's gaze, and that seems to be her reason for leaving the feast. "I will not stay," she says. "I cannot stay."

By looking at Salome in a sexually suggestive way, Herod has managed to assert some power over her. The only way she can re-establish her own power so far is by avoiding his sight. When Salome hears the voice of Jokanaan, however, she immediately identifies him in regard to the power he holds over Herod, as she asks if Jokanaan is "He of whom the Tetrarch is afraid." It seems to be Jokanaan's power over Herod that first attracts Salome's interest. After hearing Jokanaan's voice, Salome herself asserts her own will over Herod when a slave tells her that the Tetrarch wants her to return to the feast. Salome answers, "I will not go back." When the Syrian tells her, "If you do not return some misfortune may happen," she ignores his statement altogether as she asks more questions about Jokanaan. When she is told that "the Tetrarch does not wish anyone to speak to [Jokanaan]," Salome demands to speak to him.

Although the soldier and the Syrian initially refuse to obey Salome, she eventually gains the Syrian's compliance by using his desire for her to overpower him. "You will do this for me," she says, "and to-morrow when I pass in my litter beneath the gateway of the idol-sellers I will let fall for you a little flower ... it may be I will smile at you." Because the Syrian desires Salome, she easily gains control over him, and so he accedes to her wishes.

When Salome first sees Jokanaan, she steps back, away from him. At first she is repelled by him: "But he is terrible.... It is his eyes above all that are terrible.... How wasted he is!" But as Salome begins to focus on Jokanaan's body, she begins to speak of his appearance more positively, remarking that "He is like a moonbeam, like a shaft of silver. His flesh must be cool like ivory." She becomes intrigued by the prophet and says, "I must look at him closer."

But it is only when Jokanaan, who has been decrying Herodias, turns the force of his words upon Salome that she blatantly expresses desire for him. When he calls her the "Daughter of Babylon" and admonishes her to "Come not near the chosen of the Lord," instead of responding with anger, she answers him with passion: "Speak again, Jokanaan. Thy voice is wine to me. "His refusal to defer to her power seems to inflame her desire. "Jokanaan," she says, "I am amorous of thy body!... Let me touch thy body." When he again speaks against Salome, she briefly expresses a confused combination of revulsion and passion: "Thy body is hideous. ... It is thy hair that I am enamoured. . . . Thy hair is horrible."

Desire, however, wins out when she begins to focus on his mouth, saying, "There is nothing in the world so red as thy mouth. .. . Let me kiss thy mouth." At this point, the Syrian, overcome with despair at Salome's desire for Jokanaan, kills himself, but his devotion to Salome has rendered him uninteresting to her. Salome is sure of her power over the Syrian and so she does not acknowledge, or even seem to notice, his death.

Jokanaan, however, continues to reject Salome. "Cursed be thou," he says. "Daughter of an incestuous mother, be thou accursed!" Yet, no matter what he says to her, she

responds with the same words again and again, "I will kiss thy mouth, Jokanaan." He has made it clear that she has no power over him, and Salome cannot tolerate that, so she repeatedly says, not that she wants to kiss him but that she will kiss him. She tries to make it clear to him that he must give in to her. Finally, however, he leaves her sight as she left Herod's, but she continues to call after him, "I will kiss thy mouth." His refusal of her advances, in essence, his power over her, makes her more determined. When she insists that she will kiss his mouth, her sexual desire for him is inseparable from her desire for power over him.

As Salome desires Jokanaan, Herod desires Salome. When Herod comes on stage, his first words are "Where is Salome.... Why did she not return to the banquet as I commanded her." Thus he expresses his desire to see her as well as his desire for power over her. He is jealous of Salome and says over the Syrian's corpse, "Truly, I thought he looked too much at [Salome]." Herod asks Salome to drink wine with him, and she refuses. His sexual desire for her is suggested when he says, "Salome, come and eat fruit with me. I love to see in a fruit the mark of thy little teeth." When she again refuses him, he makes an even more blatant sexual remark: "Salome, come and sit next to me. I will give thee the throne of thy mother."

Salome, however, stands fast in her refusal of Herod's advances. Herod expects Salome's obedience as his due and so complains to Herodias, "You see how you have brought up this daughter of yours." Herod first asks, then commands, Salome to dance for him, but even though he is the Tetrarch, she does not obey. As Jokanaan's refusal of Salome gives him power over her, so Salome's refusal of Herod gives her power over him. When Salome will not obey his command, will not acknowledge his power, he tells her that he will give her anything, even half of his kingdom, if she will dance for him. In essence, he says that if she will give in to his passion and thus give up her power over him he will offer more power within his kingdom. She need only remain subordinate to him.

At first, Salome's dance seems a submission to the power of Herod. He has first asked, then demanded, then asked again, that she dance, and now she obeys. Herod's passion, however, has put him in a position of vulnerability. When Salome agrees to dance for him, he sees it as submission, but in actuality, her seeming submission gives her greater power over him. Because Herod has such a great desire for Salome, he agrees to submit his will to her. When he says he will give her anything she wants, he grants her almost unlimited power over him. When Salome then demands the head of Jokanaan, her power over him is complete. He is put into the position of begging her not to demand Jokanaan's head, of offering her the treasures of his kingdom, "great treasures above all price," if she will not exercise her power over him.

At this point Herodias tries to claim that Salome has asked for Jokanaan's head because "she loves her mother well," but Salome will give no one power over her. She says, "I do not heed my mother. It is for my own pleasure that I ask the head of Jokanaan." She makes it clear that she will allow no one power over her.

By appearing to surrender to Herod, Salome finally triumphs over him and, she believes, Jokanaan. When she is given the head of the prophet, Salome speaks to it, emphasizing her own power: "Ah! thou wouldst not suffer me to kiss thy mouth Jokanaan! Well! I will kiss it now ... I will bite it with my teeth as one bites a ripe fruit." She continues to talk to Jokanaan's head, speaking of her seeming triumph over him: "Thy head belongs to me. I can do with it what I will. I can throw it to the dogs and the birds of the air." Salome believes she has achieved complete control over the man who once rebuked her.

The extent of Salome's real power over Jokanaan, however, is questionable. When he dies, he does not give Salome the satisfaction of showing fear or pain. "Why does he not cry out, this man?" she asks. He never acknowledges that she has any power over him. And even though she has taken his life, he has still withheld his love. It is at this point that Salome speaks more of love than desire. I loved thee yet, Jokanaan," she says. "I love thee only... I am athirst for thy beauty." Because she loves Jokanaan, even though she has killed him, he retains his power over her.

Salome also seems to have lost her control over Herod. His talk of her shows no more desire: "She is monstrous . . . she is altogether monstrous." But she has still deprived him of his power, and so he orders Salome's death as she ordered Jokanaan's. In this way Herod seems to gain control over her, but as with Salome, power, once lost, is not easily regained. Jokanaan is still dead. Herod cannot change that. And so Herod still suffers, and his power is compromised even more because the death of Jokanaan has brought him fear of an even greater power. "Surely some terrible thing will befall," he says. "I began to be afraid." The death of Salome does not change the result of her power over him, power created by his desire.

In "The Ballad of Reading Gaol," Wilde wrote of Wooldridge, "The man had killed the thing he loved, / And so he had to die." Wooldridge's passion for his wife led him to jealousy. Jealousy reveals a sense of powerlessness and a desire for control. The only way Wooldridge could achieve that control was by the murder of his wife. He paid for that murder, however, with his life.

For Salome, Jokanaan's rejection of her desire rendered her powerless. For Herod, Salome's use of his desire to achieve her own ends showed he had no power over her. Both Salome and Herod responded to this lack of power by killing the thing they loved. But the death of Jokanaan did not free Salome from his power over her, and the death of Salome could not fully restore Herod's power to him. Both are ultimately defeated by sexual desire as well as the desire for power.

Source: Clare Cross, for *Drama for Students*, Gale, 2000.

Critical Essay #2

In this essay, Nassaar examines the theme of violence in two of Wilde's works, noting the influence of notorious murderer Jack the Ripper.

In late 1888 a murderer who came to be known as Jack the Ripper terrorized London prostitutes and captured the public's imagination through a series of violent crimes. Not only did he kill prostitutes with a knife but he also ripped and mutilated their bodies, so that the result was quite gruesome. By early 1890, when Oscar Wilde sat down to write *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the figure of Jack the Ripper was still dominant in the public mind. My thesis here is that the influence of Jack the Ripper is discernible in some of Wilde's writings, specifically *The picture of Dorian Gray* and *Salome*.

In his desire to experience all the sinful pleasure of the world, Dorian Gray in Wilde's novel seeks to go beyond anything the human race has experienced so far. Modeling himself largely on Huysmans's hero Des Esseintes, he seeks to go beyond Des Esseintes. But his relentless pursuit of evil beauty is threatened by Basil Hallward, to whom he reveals his secret. Impulsively, Dorian kills the painter, but he does so in a manner reminiscent of the Jack the Ripper murders:

Something glimmered on the top of the painted chest that faced him. His eye fell on it. He knew what it was. It was a knife that he had brought up, some days before, to cut a piece of cord, and had forgotten to take away with him. He moved slowly towards it, passing Hallward as he did so. As soon as he got behind him, he seized it, and turned round. Hallward stirred in his chair as if he was going to rise. He rushed at him, and dug the knife into the great vein that is behind the ear, crushing the man's head down to the table, and stabbing again and again.

There was a stifled groan, and the horrible sound of someone choking with blood. Three times the outstretched arms shot up convulsively, waving grotesque stiff-fingered hands in the air. He stabbed him twice more, but the man did not move. Something began to trickle on the floor. He waited for a moment, still pressing the head down. Then he threw the knife on the table, and listened.

Dorian not only uses a knife on Basil; he stabs again and again, mutilating the body. Nor does the matter end here. Jack the Ripper often disemboweled his victims and removed some inner organs. In like vein, Dorian decides to cut up the body and destroy it completely. Since he does not know how to do this, he resorts to Alan Campbell, who unwillingly performs the task for him and commits suicide as a consequence. Wilde wanted Dorian's act of murder to be seen as an exaggerated plunge into pure evil, and he sought to achieve this effect partly by associating him with Jack the Ripper. His readers in the early 1890s would not have failed to see the similarities between Dorian's act and the crimes of the dreaded Ripper. If anything, Dorian's act is at one level worse than the Ripper's, for he murders not prostitutes but a good man in the act of repentant prayer. Richard Ellmann has argued convincingly and at length that Wilde, after his first homosexual experience in 1886, regarded himself as a criminal and wrote as an artist-

criminal. It should come as no surprise, then, that he was very interested in the most famous murderer of his day and sought to echo and reflect his crimes in his literature.

This is not to argue, of course, that Wilde engaged the Jack the Ripper murders in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in order to interpret them or to add hidden meanings to the text. On the contrary, Wilde often used the environment around him in his literary works. For example, in *The Decay of Lying* the two speakers carry the names of his two sons, Cyril and Vyvyan. In *The Importance of Being Earnest* Jack Worthing's surname is the name of the town Wilde was in when he began the play, the butler is named Lane after his publisher, and Lady Bracknell carries the name of Lady Queensberry's house. There are many other examples of Wilde's use of his environment. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Wilde used Jack the Ripper as a source in presenting the murder Dorian commits. Artistically, this source serves to deepen and intensify the horror of Dorian's act.

Soon afterward, in the autumn of 1891, the desire to write a dark and sinister work of literature caught Wilde's fancy again. *Salome* is a highly complex symbolist play that has many sources, from the Bible to Mallarme's "Herodiade" and Huysmans's *A Rebours*, but Jack the Ripper is also one of its sources; he quietly occupies a corner in the background of the play and forms a part of its intricate mosaic of multi-layered symbols. There are two reasons to assert that this is the case. The first is that only two dark, serious murders are dramatically portrayed in Wilde's mature *oeuvre:* Dorian's murder of Basil and Salome's killing of John the Baptist, and there are similarities between them. If Wilde used Jack the Ripper as a source for the first murder, it is probable that he also had him in mind for the second. But the second reason is much more compelling. Despite the fact that Salome's crime is an ancient one, it has strong affinities with those of the Ripper. Both criminals, for instance, commit "sex murders." Both are so ferocious in their murders as to horrify people by their sheer savagery. And both mutilate the bodies of their victims in a similar manner. (One of the Ripper's victims was found with her head almost completely severed from her body; also, while the Ripper usually removed some of his victim's inner organs and took them with him, Salome takes John the Baptist's head.) These similarities would have been noticed in Wilde's day and the inevitable connection would have been made. Thematically, they help to connect the modern and ancient worlds and stress the constancy of human evil. Thus, the influence of the Ripper on *Salome* is more profound than on *Dorian Gray*, if perhaps less obvious.

Another difference is that while Dorian's crime is meant to suggest those of Jack the Ripper, Salome both reflects the Ripper and goes beyond him. Not only does she commit a savage sex murder, but she feasts lustfully on her victim's blood-soaked severed head. And her victim is none other than an exalted Christian saint. In *Dorian Gray* Wilde explored human evil and concluded that human nature is "gray." In *Salome* he wished to confront and explore the absolute blackness of human nature, much like Conrad soon after in *Heart of Darkness. Salome* the play goes beyond *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in its exploration of human evil Dorian has a conscience, Salome has none and Salome the character, in the crime she commits, goes beyond both Dorian and the Ripper, whose unobtrusive presence in this play, set in a distant land in biblical times, should not be ignored. In his day Jack the Ripper was regarded as the ultimate criminal,

a demented slasher with a twisted sense of morality who was the very embodiment of evil. By the end of Wilde's play, however. Salome has exceeded even the Ripper in evil; she emerges as a completely amoral and pleasure-seeking headhuntress:

SALOME: ... Tetratch. Tetratch, command your soldiers that they bring me the head of Jokanaan. *A huge black arm, the arm of the* EXECUTIONER, *comes forth from the cistern, bearing on a silver shield the head of* JOKANAAN. SALOME *seizes it*. HEROD *hides his face with his cloak*. HERODIAS *smiles and fans herself.* The NAZARENES *fall on their knees and begin to pray*. SALOME: Ah! thou wouldst not suffer me to kiss thy mouth, Jokanaan. Well! I will kiss it now. I will bite it with my teeth as one bites a ripe fruit.... Ah! I have kissed thy mouth, Jokanaan. I have kissed thy mouth. There was a bitter taste on thy lips. Was it the taste of blood...? But perchance it is the taste of love.

Salome is devoid of any moral sense. Hers is the ultimate crime. Even the depraved and lustful Herod, who murdered his own brother and robbed him of his wife, finds her crime abominable and orders her killed. In *Salome*, Wilde finally reached the heart of darkness, going beyond Dorian, Huysmans, Paler, Mallarme, and even Jack the Ripper within the framework of literature.

Source: Christopher S. Nassaar. "Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *Salome*" in the *Explicator* Vol. 53, no. 4, Summer, 1995, pp. 217-20.

Critical Essay #3

Kravec discusses the relationship between Wilde's play and the satiric illustrations that were created by Aubrey Beardsley for the published edition of Salome.

Ever since Oscar Wilde first saw them, Aubrey Beardsley's illustrations for *Salome* have caused controversy. Wilde worried that the drawings, which he believed did not capture the spirit of the play, would reduce the text to the role of "illustrating Aubrey's illustrations." Beardsley's audacious visual objectifications of depravity, looking even more "decadent" than his typical caricatures, may not match the deliberately crafted metaphors of remote, cold beauty that sustain Wilde's tragedy, yet the drawings transcend time and circumstance in much the same way that the dialogue does. Illustrator and author shared a similar sort of satirical vision. Beardsley, eager to translate or illustrate the play, commented that he "thoroughly understood" its spirit, and indeed, his drawings can augment our understanding of the play. The anachronistic drawings, like the text, strike a pose of seriousness while slyly satirizing the human folly of self-centered possessiveness by no means absent in their own society. Herod's court may be seen as a parody of the world of physical voraciousness and moral lethargy in *Dorian Gray* (itself a parody of sorts). Satire by definition involves social criticism, toward which Wilde and Beardsley gravitated, despite their association with "art for art's sake."

Beardsley caricatures Wilde in several illustrations. The resemblance of the chubby face in "The Eyes of Herod," "The Woman in the Moon," and "A Platonic Lament" to the playwright's own has been noticed from the illustrations' very first appearance. In these drawings, Wilde appears in the guise of the monstrous Herod, a central character (not an alter ego but, after all, still a projection from the author's imagination), and as the moon which may be the prime mover or merely a dispassionate observer of the action, depending on one's perspective.

The fullest depiction of Wilde appears in "Enter Herodias," a complex iconographic interpretation of Wilde's craft and Beardsley's. Herodias, in resplendent hideousness, stands in a doorway; a smug-looking Wilde appears in the foreground, outside of the "frame," gesturing languidly toward his creation. Unlike the roly-poly presence in the other drawings, he is not a caricature, but resembles the Wilde seen in contemporary photographs. The portrait could be called flattering except that Wilde wears ajester's costume, with an owl cap; while he gestures toward Herodias with one hand, he holds in the other a copy of the play and a curious-looking scepter which resembles nothing so much as the caduceus the rod entwined with two serpents which the god Mercury carries and which is also a symbol of the medical profession.

This magic wand conjures up a number of associations, all concerning the reconciliation of opposites into a healing synthesis:

The wings symbolize transcendence; the air; the wand is power, the double serpent is the opposites in dualism, ultimately to be united; they are also the serpents of healing

and poison, illness and health; they are hermetic and homeopathic; "nature can overcome nature"; the complementary nature of the two forces operative in the universe and the union of the sexes.

In handing Wilde this symbolic staff, Beardsley portrays him as a godlike jester-alchemist, creating images of folly to convey insight.

Wilde's role as magician appears more clearly in *Salome* than does his equally important one as physician. The drama's elaborate play of parallel metaphors both profound and absurd traps and bedazzles the characters caught in their own conceits. Salome's admirers address her in a series of vapid metaphors that shroud her more completely than seven veils; even she cannot penetrate their opacity and find her true identity. A creature of paradox, she resembles both her mother and Iokanaan, a double likeness which Beardsley captures. She is both destroyer and victim. Her request for Iokanaan's head represents for her both epiphany and apocalypse. Wilde points proudly to the elaborate, paradoxical geste he has created.

But Oscar Wilde as a physician of society through this drama? Wilde and Beardsley both had contradictory natures. Both flaunted the conventions of art, propriety, and morality, and yet, did so through the medium of satire, which at least ostensibly attempts to correct. (Even Beardsley's unfinished novel *Under the Hill* has been identified by Linda C. Bowling as a satire on his contemporaries.)

Both men converted to Catholicism later in life. If Beardsley had at this time more than a passing acquaintance with scripture, he might have had in mind the caduceus which Moses makes in Numbers XXI, 4-9, after the Lord sends a plague of serpents to punish the disobedient Jewish people. When Moses appeals to the Lord, he is told to fashion a bronze serpent and mount it on a pole. Whoever looks upon the effigy is healed. This parable might be applied metaphorically to the drama.

Salome, an inquisitive soul incubated in a decadent society, looks for transcendence but, like the other characters, she fails to find it, refusing to listen to a message she does not want to hear. In the tragic fates of the characters limned by Wilde and Beardsley, the audience might perceive its own illness and draw, if not healing, at least greater self-awareness. Although both playwright and artist probably would have winced at being called "moralists," they consciously placed before their contemporaries a bizarre yet reflective mirror.

Source: Maureen T. Kravec. "Wilde's *Salome*" in the *Explicator*, Vol. 42, no. 1, Fall, 1983, pp. 30-32.

Adaptations

Salome was adapted as a silent film in 1923. This version was directed by Charles Bryant. It was produced by Alia Nazimova and also starred Nazimova as Salome and Mitchell Lewis as Herod.

A 1970 Spanish version of *Salome* was directed by Rafael Gassent.

Another film version was produced and directed by Carmelo Bene in 1972.

A 1986 film, directed by Claude d'Anna, stars Jo Champa as Salome and Tomas Milian as Herod.

The 1988 film *Salome's Last Dance*, directed by Ken Russell and produced by Penny Corke, features Nickolas Grace as Oscar Wilde watching a production of his play staged in a brothel by the proprietor. Imogen Millaid-Scott plays Salome as well as a woman named Rose. Stratford Johns plays both Herod and Alfred Taylor. Douglas Hodge plays Jokanaan and Lord Alfred Douglas.

Topics for Further Study

Research the role of women in Victorian culture. How does *Salome* reflect Victorian beliefs about gender roles?

Who is the main character in *Salome?* Some critics would answer Salome herself, some would argue Herod, and Wilde himself, though probably in jest, said that the moon is the protagonist of the play. Using evidence from the play, support your point of view.

Read the story of Salome in the Bible, Matthew 14:1-12. In what ways has Wilde changed the Biblical story? What has he achieved with these changes?

Read Wilde's play *A Woman of No Importance*. Compare the moral issues raised in this play with those raised in *Salome*. How are the two plays alike? How are they different?

Discuss Wilde's use of color in *Salome*. What function does the frequent mention of color serve? What might the different colors in the play symbolize?

Read Sophocles's *Antigone*, a play which also has a strong female character who battles a king and pays with her life. Antigone, however, is generally considered a heroine, while there is some debate about the nature of Salome's character. Compare and contrast these two characters in light of what might be considered "proper" roles for women.

Compare and Contrast

30 A.D.: Segregation based on gender is rigid. In some cases, wives are little better than slaves. Recent scholarship has uncovered evidence of individual women who did have some power in their society, but such women were rare.

1893: The status of women is in flux. Some embrace the concept of the perfect submissive woman, while others embrace the idea of the "new woman," educated and more free than her predecessors.

Today: Women have achieved many opportunities unimaginable by previous generations. Much discrimination against women, previously considered acceptable, has ended through custom or law, though women still face difficulties in many areas.

30 A.D.: The Romans allow communities within their empire a modicum of religious freedom, unless said religions threaten the peace of the empire. Numerous religions are represented in Roman society.

1893: Christianity predominates in Victorian culture, and adherents of other religions are often treated with suspicion. Atheism and agnosticism gain popularity among those seeking alternatives.

Today: Although there continue to be a large number of people practicing a variety of faiths, many do not see religion as part of their day-today lives. Many are agnostics or atheists.

30 A.D.: Rules against sexual misconduct are applied unequally. Polygamy is accepted among the wealthy. Adultery by women can be punished with death while adulterous men receive no such punishment.

1893: Society has rigid rules regarding sexual morality, but many question such rules, acting in opposition to them. Homosexuality is punishable by imprisonment.

Today: Variations in sexual activity are more acceptable. Homosexuals are not subject to the legal restrictions of former times, but gays still suffer from prejudice and even violence at the hands of others.

What Do I Read Next?

The Importance of Being Earnest, a play by Wilde produced in 1895, is generally considered Wilde's best dramatic work. It's cleverness and wit reveal a side of Wilde not as apparent in *Salome*.

Wilde's plays *A Woman of No Importance* and *Lady Windermere's Fan*, like *Salome*, deal with issues regarding women and sexual morality.

"The Angel in the House," a 1942 essay by Virginia Woolf, discusses the traditional role of women during Woolf s Victorian childhood and her struggle to overcome that role's limitations.

The Awakening by Kate Chopin, first published in 1899, is an American novel about a woman who casts aside traditional female roles, abandons her family, and seeks fulfillment of her own desires. Like Salome, she is punished for her rebellion.

Sophocles's play *Antigone*, written in approximately 441 B.C., is, like *Salome*, about a young woman who defies a king and is killed for her rebellion. Unlike Salome, however, Antigone is portrayed as a heroine.

Aesthetes and Decadents of the 1890s, edited by Karl Beckson, is an anthology of British literary work from the period in which Wilde wrote *Salome*. This anthology contains work by Wilde as well as by other authors. It also contains a number of the Aubrey Beardsley illustrations for *Salome*,which appeared in the play's first published edition.

Further Study

Briggs, Asa. *A Social History of England*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1994.

This provides information about English society from prehistoric times to the present. It contains a lengthy chapter on the Victorian period.

Ellmann, Richard. *Oscar Wilde*, Vintage Books, 1987.

This book is one of the most recent and complete biographies of Wilde.

Ellmann, Richard. *Oscar Wilde: A Collection of Critical Essays*, Prentice-Hall, 1969.

This book contains a number of essays and poems about Wilde, many written by those who knew him.

Hoare, Philip. *Oscar Wilde's Last Stand: Decadence, Conspiracy, and the Most Outrageous Trial of the Century*, Arcade, 1997.

This book concerns a 1918 production of Salome that led to a trial, when Maud Allan, playing Salome, was denounced by a right-wing Member of Parliament, whom she sued for libel. Hoare contends that the trial became a trial of Wilde himself and all he was believed to represent.

Raby, Peter. *Oscar Wilde*, Cambridge University Press, 1988.

This book provides background for many of Wilde's essays, stories, poems, and plays, including a chapter on *Salome.*

Worth, Katherine. *Oscar Wilde*, Grove, 1983.

This is a good basic introduction to Wilde's plays and includes a chapter on *Salome*.

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Introduction

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The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's For Students Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on classic novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamedfor instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as The Narrator and alphabetized as Narrator. If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name Jean Louise Finch would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname Scout Finch.
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an at-a-glance comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature, a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Drama for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Drama for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from DfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from DfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Drama for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Drama for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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