

## Upstaging decadence?

### Imperialism, Humanism and the Symbolist Mode in *Salomé*

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Vincent Sherry's signal account of how the high Modernism of T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, et al. consciously suppressed its decadent roots because of the morally and politically invidious reputation of the movement – in favour of the more salubrious attractions of the symbolist mode – suggests that a fundamental 'critical misprision' continues to affect our understandings of Modernist aesthetics.<sup>1</sup> Sherry proposes that although '*décadence* once enjoyed an equal share with *symbolisme* in the making of the inventiveness of *fin-de-siècle* literature, subsequent constructions tend to disaggregate the pair [...] turning *symbolisme* into the better angel of its erstwhile twin, its increasingly disapproved double'.<sup>2</sup> The later demonization of the decadent mode by Modernists appears to be anticipated for Sherry in the reception history of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890, 1891), which saw Oscar Wilde exchange allusions to the 'dangerous' work of the '*Décadents*' in the first edition with more morally palatable references to the 'wonderful' work of the '*Symbolistses*' in the extended version of the novel. For Sherry, ultimately this exchange only works to 'reveal [...] the subsidiary power and heavier menace of the "decadence" that symbolism nominally, but only nominally, overrules'. According to Sherry, this conscious censorship of the decadent mode, whether nominal or self-imposed, meant that 'Oscar Wilde would be as notable an absence in subsequent understandings of literary modernism as he was a conspicuous presence in the contemporary scene of English "decadence"'.<sup>3</sup> Yet, not only the continued performances of Wilde's plays after 1895, but also the writing of biographies by Robert Sherard, Arthur Ransome, et al., reissues of his work, his posthumous appearance in two sensational trials (1913 and 1918), and the recent recovery of Wilde's influence on practitioners of 'decadent modernism' and the 'new decadence', alternatively suggests that he remained a palpable presence in the extended field of literary modernisms.<sup>4</sup>

While Sherry renders symbolism's triumph in *Dorian Gray* over its 'disapproved double' to be at best cosmetic, markedly, in Wilde's Biblical play *Salomé* (1891; 1894) decadence resolutely appears to prevail over its symbolist confrere. In this respect, the dramatization of a clash between two avant-garde movements at the heart of Wilde's play

strikingly foreshadows current debates about the respective constituency, reception and politics of both modes. And, as suggested by Yeeyon Im's recent characterization of *Salomé* as a 'failed' symbolist play, this debate is far from settled.<sup>5</sup> The aspect of decadence that was to prove particularly fruitful for Wilde's *Salomé* was the fascination that decadents, from Charles Baudelaire to successors such as J.K. Huysmans, had shown in the decline of ancient Rome. Drawing comparisons between the waning of imperial Rome and *belle époque* Paris, Paul Verlaine's poem 'Langueur' (1883) memorably opens with the lines: 'Je suis l'Empire à la fin de la décadence/ Qui regarde passer les grands Barbares blancs'.<sup>6</sup> By contrast, in his *Degeneration* (1893; 1895), a text that diagnosed all the permissive and progressive trends of the *fin de siècle* as pathological, Max Nordau resolutely mocked the decadents' attempts to align themselves with the stylistic excesses and incongruities that marked the Latin writing of the Late Empire (Lucan, Petronius, et al.), which had attended its collapse.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, across the channel, for Wilde, parallels between the Roman Empire and its modern British counterpart, as earlier advanced in Edward Gibbon's magisterial *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-89), were to take on an increasingly creative and political significance. As Matthew Potolsky succinctly observes, Wilde's 'Dorian [Gray] becomes decadent by reading a decadent book and imitating its hero, who himself becomes decadent by reading a 'shameful' book while imitating the decadent Roman emperor Tiberius'.<sup>8</sup> In December 1891, while in Paris writing *Salomé*, Wilde made the pointed assertion to Edmond de Goncourt that 'je suis Irlandais de race, et les Anglais m'ont condamné à parler le langage de Shakespeare', admittedly a jocular statement but one that nonetheless expresses his powerful sense of himself as a colonised subject.<sup>9</sup>

It is telling that whilst writing *Salomé* Wilde's avowal of his subjugation to Goncourt saw him in tandem intensify the parallels in *Salomé* between Roman imperialism, its modern British successor and the decadent mode earlier intimated in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. In *Salomé* King Herod's passivity and inability to control the factional religious battles that afflict his kingdom mirror the decadent vacillation of his literary forebear Des Esseintes (from J. K. Huysmans' *A rebours*, 1884), who is unable to follow through on a trip he has meticulously planned to London. Herod's frequent and increasingly paranoid declarations of the extent of the Emperor's power and presence ironically see him misunderstand Iokanaan's invocations of the Saviour of the World as a reference to Caesar who, according to Herod, can do anything while, by contrast, his injunctions against the miracles that Christ

has reportedly performed are laughably obtuse. Again, like his decadent precursors (Poe's) Roderick Usher and Huysmans's *Des Esseintes* – who, tellingly, are both the 'last descendant[s]' of enervated noble families – Wilde's Herod is also afflicted with the debilitating decadent conditions of morbidity, hysteria and sterility.<sup>10</sup> His frequent public avowals of his subservience to Rome, his quasi-religious belief in the omnipotence of the Emperor and his goading of his wife Herodias with accusations of sterility betray the precariousness of his hold over the kingdom that he has taken from his brother. Certainly, Sarah Bernhardt's anxiety that it was Herod rather than Salomé who appeared to be the central figure of the play is borne out by Wilde's powerful dramatization of the Tetrarch's agitated state of mind in which he finds something as innocuous as the touch of a garland of roses torturous and, in his hypersensitive state, ominously envisions its rose petals as 'stains of blood on the cloth'.<sup>11</sup> Given the association of Salomé and the moon that opens the play, it is telling that Herod is increasingly in thrall to the feverish symbolism that the changeable, sterile, drunken and, finally, blood red moon appears to actuate in him. Even the jewels that Herod hoards and which he offers to Salomé as a bribe so that she will not insist on Iokanaan's execution ('onyxes like the eyeballs of a dead woman, moonstones that change when the moon changes, turquoises which can turn a fruitful woman barren') betray the sterility of Herod's rule.<sup>12</sup> In his final desperate plea for Salomé to change her mind about being presented with Iokanaan's head as her reward for performing the Dance of the Seven Veils, Herod goes as far as to make her the offer of the sacred Veil of Sanctuary which he has stolen from the Jews. The invidious exchange proposed by Herod reduces the most sacrosanct of objects in the Jewish faith to the level of commodity and bargaining chip and, again, underlines both the extent of his estrangement from the people over whom he rules and the magnitude of his profanity.

Wilde's focus on Galilee as a colonial outpost of the Roman Empire, riven by factionalism and under the rule of a dysfunctional Royal family entirely alienated from its subjects, increasingly appears to stand as a metaphor for contemporary Ireland in what Joe Cleary elsewhere has described as its 'objectively colonial' relationship to England.<sup>13</sup> The fact that four years earlier, Wilde had forged an emotive analogy between the respective persecutions suffered by the Jewish people and the Irish in his damning 1889 review of J. A. Froude's *Two Chiefs of Dunboy* when he declared that '[w]hat captivity was to the Jews, exile has been to the Irish' consolidates the allegorical relation signalled in the play between

the Jewish people and modern British rule in Ireland.<sup>14</sup> Herod's soldiers are puzzled and bemused by the loud religious disputations undertaken by the Jews whom they liken to 'wild beasts howling', which indicates that these agents and foot-soldiers of Herod's tetrarchy enact a conscious *méconnaissance* to rule over the native populace.<sup>15</sup> More occupation force than defenders of the realm, Herod's soldiers' essential estrangement from the Jews renders them akin to an alien colonial force and, in this, the court of Galilee bears more than a passing resemblance to Dublin Castle.

In Wilde's play, Salomé's seductive offer of a 'little green flower' to the Syrian Captain functions to parallel sexual transgression in biblical Judea with contemporary London and Paris. Not only was the colour green associated with decadence, but the green carnation, as worn by Parisian homosexuals, was also soon to become the chosen, if enigmatic, insignia of Wilde's circle.<sup>16</sup> By contrast, the poignancy of the Page of Herodias's doomed love for the same Young Syrian affords a sympathetic, although understandably understated, representation of homosexual desire in the play. Certainly, the recent public association of Wilde with homosexual scandal, London's 1889 Cleveland Street Scandal, might explain Wilde's implicit personal motivations behind this comparatively sympathetic, albeit muted, portrayal.<sup>17</sup> Charges of imperial decadence further manifest themselves in the play not only in Iokanaan's frenzied onslaughts against the actual and imputed sexual indiscretions and perversions of the Royal Family, but also in the official attempts to silence him.

While Ellis Hanson has argued that 'in *Salome*, Wilde created a canonical instance of both [decadent and symbolist aesthetics] in seamless harmony', the contest between the two modes for aesthetic predominance signalled by the initial exchange between the Page of Herodias and the Young Syrian suggests otherwise.<sup>18</sup> Thus, the Young Syrian's opening declaration of Salomé's beauty is offset by the Page's decadent counter invocation of a moribund moon which is 'like a dead woman ...looking for dead things'.<sup>19</sup> The Syrian's subsequent response attempts to forestall this moribund decadent visualization by derealizing in symbolist mode the Page's sinister simile as he now reads the moon to be 'like a little princess who wears a yellow veil, and whose feet are of silver [and ...] who has little white doves for feet'.<sup>20</sup> In turn, he subsequently projects the moon's ephemeral qualities on to Salomé, which sees him envision the Princess as 'the shadow of a white rose in a mirror of silver'.<sup>21</sup> However, akin to Sherry's description of the way in which Wilde's *Dorian Gray*

'reveals the subsidiary power and heavier menace of the 'decadence' that symbolism [...] only nominally, overrules', the Syrian's symbolist attempt to overturn the sinister power of the Page's decadent descriptors fails as the Page repeatedly asserts the danger of looking at the Princess, with the Syrian's subsequent suicide only appearing to confirm his prophecies about the moon's deathly powers. While Salomé's oscillation between extremes of desire and loathing for Iokanaan's physical characteristics can be read as an expression of an object-less queer desire,<sup>22</sup> it is significant that Potolsky alternatively reads the epideictic discourse of 'praise and blame' that Salomé directs at Iokanaan as 'central to both the critical and [...] poetic techniques' of decadent writers'.<sup>23</sup>

And yet, as noted in the exchange between the Syrian and the Page, the nature of the 'praise and blame' that Salomé accords to the ivory prophet can be seen to reiterate the play's central conflict between the ineffable attractions of the symbolist mode and the pernicious affect of its decadent compeer. Initially, Salomé's attraction to the prophet's body takes on the ethereal register of symbolist descriptors ('a shaft of silver', 'whiter than the feet of the dawn when they light on the leaves [and] the breast of the moon when she lies on the breast of the sea'), while rejection by Iokanaan induces Salomé's instantaneous expression of visceral disgust where this same body is now perceived to be 'a whited sepulchre, full of loathsome things'.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, in trying to dissuade Salomé from insisting on receiving Iokanaan's head as her reward for dancing the Dance of the Seven Veils, Herod seeks to tempt Salomé with an opening offer of fifty rare white peacocks before he embarks on detailing a list of exotic (and profane) jewels with which he can also reward her. While Herod tries to entice Salomé with an ephemeral vision of herself surrounded by white peacocks that will make her look like the 'moon in the midst of a great white cloud', she again rejects another ineffably symbolist vision of herself (this time from a man whose desire for her is even more transgressive than that of the Syrian) in favour of her hypnotic insistence on being brought the 'Head of Iokanaan'.<sup>25</sup> Alternatively, the jewels that she refuses – which include 'opals that burn always [...] onyxes like the eyeballs of a dead woman [...] a crystal into which it is not lawful for a woman to look at' – represent what Potolsky has also described as 'Decadent collections [...] made up of objects gathered for their singularity or their supreme embodiment of some rare perversity'.<sup>26</sup> Neither the promise of decadent *objets* nor symbolist visualizations can forestall Salomé's undeviating pursuit of the ivory prophet.

And yet, while Salomé refuses to stay in the symbolist character accorded to her by the men who desire her, her unwavering assertion of her own individual will and desire might equally be characterised as an expression of symbolist principles. Here, it is significant that in 1899, in *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, Arthur Symons having earlier praised the Decadent mode, now explicitly proselytised about the secular spirituality incarnated in the Symbolist mode, as variously expressed for him in the work of a number of French avant-garde writers such as Laforgue, Maeterlinck and Verlaine, where symbolism, in opposition to decadence, now spoke so 'intimately, so solemnly, as only religion had hitherto spoken to us'.<sup>27</sup> According to Karl Beckson, Symons 'is an unfrocked priest in self-imposed isolation, [who] carries out the sacred rituals of his calling by presiding over the greatest mystery – the creation of eternal Beauty' who clearly articulated a secular spiritual role for the (symbolist) artist.<sup>28</sup> Although Salomé's commitment to realising her individual desire for Iokanaan is fervid and climaxes in necrophilia, it is also pertinent to note, in anticipation of Symons, her dedication to Iokanaan's beauty, a transgressive secular devotion that sees her both co-opt the biblical Song of Solomon in praise of the prophet's attractions and ultimately position herself in competition with God for Iokanaan's love. Salomé directs the following blasphemous words to Iokanaan's severed head: 'Thou didst put upon thine eyes the covering of him who would see his God. Well, thou hast seen thy God, Iokanaan but me, me, thou didst never see. If thou hadst seen me, thou hadst loved me'.<sup>29</sup>

As Petra Dierkes Thrun argues, Salome represents a 'fierce, shocking, and alluring vision of erotic and aesthetic transgression as an ecstatic realm for modern individualism and transformed secular humanism'.<sup>30</sup> By contrast, Yeeyon Im recently suggested that *Salomé* 'fails' as a symbolist text because it lacks either the 'spiritual issue of the salvation of the soul [of] Yeats's *The Countess Cathleen*' and 'the fatalistic sense of doom that dominates Maeterlinck's *Princess Maleine*'.<sup>31</sup> Instead, Im proposes that Wilde's 'dramatic inversion of the conventional dichotomy of sacred/profane as well as of serious/frivolous [...] is so abrupt in *Salomé* as to render the play almost absurd, preposterous, and Camp', a quality which Susan Sontag famously associates with 'frivolity, style over content, homosexuality, exaggeration, and extravagance, artificiality and self-reflexivity, duplicity, androgyny and queerness, all of which [according to Im] are applicable to Wilde's *Salomé*'.<sup>32</sup> While admittedly Im's 'Camp' reading is original, simultaneously, the application of Sontag's

assertion that 'the Camp sensibility is disengaged, depoliticized – or at least apolitical' disregards Wilde's political motivations for writing in the symbolist mode.<sup>33</sup>

The British government's censorship of the play on religious grounds saw Wilde, in an interview with Maurice Sisley for Paris's *Le Gaulois*, declare that the suppression of *Salomé* made him wish to take up French citizenship and, thus, 'transfer [himself] to another fatherland, of which I have long been enamoured'.<sup>34</sup> Robert Ross, who was simultaneously interviewing Wilde for the *Pall Mall Budget*, also reported Wilde as saying that 'I shall leave England and settle in France' and that 'I am not English, I'm Irish – which is quite another thing'.<sup>35</sup> In this interview with Ross, in which Wilde asserted his Irishness in the face of the Censor's decision, Wilde also reflected on his attraction to writing in French and to Maeterlinck's style in particular:

My idea of writing the play was simply this: I have one instrument that I know that I can command, and that is the English Language. There was another instrument to which I had listened all my life, and I wanted once to touch this new instrument to see whether I could make any beautiful thing out of it. The play was written in Paris some six months ago, where I read it to some young poets, who admired it immensely. Of course, there are modes of expression that a French man of letters would not have used, but they give a certain relief or colour to the play. A great deal of the curious effect that Maeterlinck produces comes from the fact that he, a Flamand by race, writes in an alien language.<sup>36</sup>

In this revealing interview, Wilde accorded himself an alternative identity as the implicit equal to (an unnamed) 'French man of letters', a position seemingly validated by the praise of the young Parisian poets who 'admired' his play.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, it is significant that Wilde equated writing *Salomé* in French with Maeterlinck's own work in the medium of what Wilde deemed to be an 'alien language'. Notwithstanding Wilde's incorrect supposition that French was a language imposed upon Maeterlinck since, according to Joseph Donohue, it was spoken alongside Flemish in his parental home, Wilde's vision of the Belgian artist working in a foreign language enforced upon him resonates implicitly with his own disaffiliation from the English language in *Salomé*.<sup>38</sup> Given Wilde's earlier statement to Goncourt in December 1891 about being an Irishman colonised by the English language, and

his sense that the imposition of an 'alien language' on Maeterlinck had given him a unique style, we can see that Wilde believed that similarly writing in the French symbolist mode further effected his liberation from what he considered to be his disenfranchised status as a colonised ('condemned') subject of the British Empire.

Where ultimately Wilde's play pessimistically envisioned the triumph of imperial decadence over a liberating symbolist aesthetic in *Salomé* and, to a certain extent, in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, by contrast Arthur Symons was to offer a strikingly more idealist and optimistic vision of the growth of French symbolism beyond national borders in *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* as he observed how its impact was being felt further afield in countries such as Russia, Holland, Spain and Germany.<sup>39</sup> Notably, Symons dedicated the book to W.B. Yeats because, according to him, it was a symbolist aesthetic that fired the fledgling Irish Literary movement and which, in turn, made Yeats the 'chief representative' of the symbolist School 'in our country'.<sup>40</sup> Symons's praise of Yeats demonstrates both a marked elision of Irishness and Englishness and a striking imperviousness to the specificities of national contexts that is only now being addressed by contemporary scholars.<sup>41</sup> For example, Sherry's interpretation of the significance of W.B. Yeats's seminal influence over the writing of Symons's *Symbolist Movement* urges us to 'look to the case of Yeats as the most indicative record of the impasse between the imagining of a new Ireland and the remnant of an older decadence'. And he further argues that Yeats's 'own masterful example accounts in the end for nothing less than the supplanting of decadence by symbolism as the identity and category of major power in literary histories following Symons's'.<sup>42</sup> Ultimately, for Sherry, 'the powerful lure of symbolism, which is bound up with the magisterial status of Yeats himself, has displaced the ethos of decadence as an explanatory paradigm' for modernism.<sup>43</sup> Clearly, Sherry's sense that (Irish) Modernism, as forged by Yeats, which recast the impasse between (imperial) decadence and Irish cultural nationalism into a symbolist aesthetic has ramifications for our understanding of *Salomé*. With reference to Wilde's implicit belief that the writing of his symbolist play in French freed him from imperial oppression, *Salomé*'s death at the hands of the decadent imperial state and the failure of a secular spiritualised symbolist aesthetic to sustain itself that it signals is puzzling.



Given Wilde's growing nationalism, this unanticipated pessimism can perhaps be best understood in the context of the belief that Wilde expressed on his American Lecture tour of 1882 that seven centuries of the British presence in Ireland had destroyed Irish culture.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, his 1888 review of poems by W.E. Henley and William Sharpe equally articulated Wilde's cynicism about a cultural nationalism which sought to revivify the national muse by relying on what he considered to be a superficial deployment of archaisms and dialect in poetry.<sup>45</sup> In turn, given his own affinity to the symbolist mode, it is perhaps surprising that Yeats was to express his distaste for *Salomé* to the poet and dramatist Thomas Sturge Moore in 1906 in terms that suggest a fundamental misreading of the ponderous symbolist aesthetic of Wilde's play ('sluggish', 'pretentious').<sup>46</sup> Moreover, the grounds on which Yeats contested Wilde's claim to be a poet in *Salomé* ('He thought he was writing beautifully when he had collected beautiful things & thrown them together in a heap') appears equally dismissive of both Wilde's stylistic practice of enumerating decadent *objets*, as also seen in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *The Sphinx*, and repetition as symbolist effect.<sup>47</sup> (By contrast, on sending Maeterlinck the play, Wilde received a laudatory response from the Belgian dramatist who thanked him for his 'mystérieux, étrange et admirable Salomé, [...] ce rêve dont je ne me suis pas encore expliqué la puissance').<sup>48</sup> And finally, Yeats's further charge that Wilde 'never made anything organic' also clearly signals that he considered *Salomé* to be the antithesis of his own project for the Irish Literary Renaissance based on Irish myth and folklore.<sup>49</sup> Certainly, Yeats's analysis of *Salomé* and his simultaneous dismissal of both the symbolist and decadent aspect of the play would appear (after Sherry's conceptualisation) to undermine Wilde's Modernist credentials *per se*. And yet, both Noreen Doody's recent argument that Yeats's 'unnecessarily barbed' critique of the play can be understood as an expression of 'his own anxiety in relation to his precursor' and her analysis of the rewrites that Yeats undertook in his plays in response to seeing performances of *Salomé* demonstrates the palpable, if unacknowledged, influence of Wilde over his erstwhile admirer.<sup>50</sup>

The triumph of the decadent mode over its symbolist compeer enacted in *Salomé* appears to anticipate the revisionist readings of Sherry, Hext and others in restoring decadence to the originary narrative of the Modernist movement. In the play, decadence is

associated with imperial vice whilst alternatively Wilde suggested that he found the symbolist mode to be liberating from the shackles of the English language. And yet, in this respect, Salomé's execution at the hands of the decadent imperial state suggests a certain pessimism on Wilde's part about the success of any insurgent action against the imperial state. Poignantly, Wilde's own incarceration for acts of 'gross indecency' in 1895 saw him become the scapegoat of the decadent imperial state, himself, allegedly to deflect homosexual scandal from the incumbent Liberal Prime Minister Lord Rosebery.<sup>51</sup> Ultimately, however, it is hoped that the queer Decadent *Salomé* described above redresses in some measure what Eibhear Walshe has described as Wilde's twentieth-century appropriation by 'Shaw, Yeats, Joyce and Behan' in their attempt to 'nationalise' Wilde 'as a figure of [...] anti-colonial resistance' at the price of 'mitigat[ing] his aberrant homosexuality for those writers and indeed for their society'.<sup>52</sup>

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Vincent Sherry, *Modernism and the Reinvention of Decadence* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015) p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>4</sup> 1913 saw Alfred Douglas's unsuccessful libel prosecution against Arthur Ransome for his 1912 study *Oscar Wilde: A Critical Study*, in which expurgated material from *De Profundis* featured heavily. 1918 saw Wilde hit the headlines again when the Canadian actress and dancer Maud Allan launched a notorious libel prosecution against the MP Noel Pemberton-Billing for claiming that her version of Wilde's *Salome* (*Visions of Salome*) promoted the 'Cult of the Clitoris'. Kate Hext and Alex Murray (eds.), *Decadence in the Age of Modernism* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2019) pp. 1-2, 8; Kirsten Macleod 'The Queerness of Being 1890 in 1922: Carl Van Vechten and the New Decadence' in Hext and Murray, *Decadence*, pp. 235 and 236.

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<sup>5</sup> Yeeyon Im, “‘A seriousness that fails’”: Reconsidering Symbolism in Oscar Wilde’s *Salome*, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 45 (1) (2017), p. 163

<sup>6</sup> ‘I am the Empire in the last of its decline/That sees the tall fairhaired Barbarians pass’, Paul Verlaine ‘Langeur’, *Selected Poems*, trans. by Martin Sorrell (Oxford, New York et al: Oxford University Press, 2009) pp. 131-2.

<sup>7</sup> Max Nordau, *Degeneration*, (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1993) p. 300.

<sup>8</sup> Matthew Potolsky, *The Decadent Republic of Letters: Taste, Politics and the Cosmopolitan Community from Baudelaire to Beardsley* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 2013), p. 97.

<sup>9</sup> ‘I am Irish by race and the English have condemned me to speak the language of Shakespeare,’ Wilde, *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*, Merlin Holland and Rupert Hart-Davis (eds.) (London: Fourth Estate, 2000), p. 505.

<sup>10</sup> Joris-Karl Huysmans, *Against Nature (A rebours)*, trans. Margaret Mauldon, ed. Nicholas White (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde* [1987] (London et al: Penguin, 1988), p. 351; Wilde, *Salome*, p. 724.

<sup>12</sup> Wilde, *Salome*, p. 728.

<sup>13</sup> Richard English, *Irish Freedom: The History of Nationalism in Ireland* [2006] (London, Basingstoke and Oxford: Pan 2007), p. 125. Ireland’s situation as a satrapy of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland could be read as analogous to Galilee’s politically ambiguous status as a ‘client’ kingdom of the Roman Empire. Ina Ferris notes that ‘[w]here the names of Scotland and England have been resolved into the larger unity of Great Britain, holding out the possibility of both preserving and assimilating national difference, Ireland stands within the union but outside the unity, ambiguously attached through vague coordination: “and Ireland”’, *The Romantic National Tale and the Question of Ireland*, (Cambridge, New York, et al.,: Cambridge University Press, 2002) pp. 1-2.

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<sup>14</sup> This review appeared in the *Pall Mall Gazette* in August 1889 bearing Wilde's initials only.

See Oscar Wilde, 'Mr Froude's Blue Book [on Ireland]', reprinted in Richard Ellmann, *The Artist as Critic: Critical Writings of Oscar Wilde* (New York: Random House, 1968) p. 136.

<sup>15</sup> Wilde, *Salome*, p. 707.

<sup>16</sup> Wilde, *Salome*, p. 712; Im 'A seriousness that fails', p. 169. When asked the meaning of the green carnation Wilde replied: '[n]othing whatever but that is just what nobody will guess'. Wilde qtd. in Matthew Sturgis, *Oscar, a Life* (London: Apollo, 2018), p.443.

<sup>17</sup> See W. E. Henley, '[article title]', *The Scots Observer*, July 5<sup>th</sup> 1890, reprinted in Stuart Mason (ed.) *Oscar Wilde, Art and Morality; a Defence of The Picture of Dorian Gray* (London: J. Jacobs, 1908) p. 12.

<sup>18</sup> Ellis Hanson, 'Salome, Simile, Symboliste' in Jason Hall and Alex Murray (eds.), *Decadent Poetics, Literature and Form at The British Fin de Siècle* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) p. 145.

<sup>19</sup> Wilde, *Salome*, p. 707.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 707.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 707.

<sup>22</sup> Significantly for David Halperin, '[u]nlike gay identity, which, though deliberately proclaimed an act of affirmation, is nonetheless rooted in the positive fact of homosexual object-choice, queer identity need not be grounded in any positive truth or in any stable reality'. He goes on to suggest that '[q]ueer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. *There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers*' (original emphasis). Halperin's sense of the instability of queer identity throws light on Salomé's impetuous, changeable and inexplicably obsessive desire for the emaciated prophet. See David M. Halperin, *Saint Foucault, Towards a Gay Hagiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 62; see also Wilde, *Salome*, pp. 713-4.

<sup>23</sup> Potolsky, *Decadent Republic*, p. 8.

<sup>24</sup> Wilde, *Salome*, pp. 713-4.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 727.

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- <sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 728; Potolsky, *Decadent Republic*, p. 74.
- <sup>27</sup> Symons, *Symbolist Movement*, pp. 7 and 9.
- <sup>28</sup> Karl Beckson, *Arthur Symons: A Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p. 194.
- <sup>29</sup> Wilde, *Salome*, p. 730.
- <sup>30</sup> Petra Dierkes-Thrun, *Salome's Modernity: Oscar Wilde and the Aesthetics of Transgression* (Ann Arbor: the University of Michigan Press, 2011), p. 2.
- <sup>31</sup> Im, 'A seriousness that fails', p. 163.
- <sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 164.
- <sup>33</sup> Although David Weir notes the rebirth of decadence in the 1960s instigated by Susan Sontag's definition of 'camp', he is nonetheless adamant that the 'definition of camp should not be taken as a definition of decadence'. *Decadence: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p.8
- <sup>34</sup> Maurice Sisley, 'I Adore Paris', extracted from *La Salomé* de M. Oscar Wilde, *Le Gaulois* (Paris) (29 June 1892), p.1. Reprinted in E.H. Mikhail, *Oscar Wilde: Interviews and Recollections*, vol 1 (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1979), p. 190.
- <sup>35</sup> Robert Ross, *The Pall Mall Budget* (London), XL (30 June 1892), p. 947. Reprinted in Mikhail, *Interviews and Recollections*, p. 188.
- <sup>36</sup> Ross, *Pall Mall Budget* (30 June 1893), p. 947. Reprinted in Mikhail, *Interviews and Recollections*, p. 192.
- <sup>37</sup> Richard Ellmann notes that 'on Goncourt's death in 1896, the Academie Goncourt was founded, a French Academician, actuated by like feelings, proposed Wilde along with Tolstoy for membership'. Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde*, p. 333.
- <sup>38</sup> This disaffiliation from the English language is underlined by the comparative disinterest he showed for the English translation of the play. See Joseph Donohue (ed.) 'Salomé: Introduction', *Complete Works*, p. 331.
- <sup>39</sup> Symons, *Symbolist Movement* (1899), pp. 6-7, 9, v.
- <sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. v.
- <sup>41</sup> See, for example, Raphael Ingelbein's article 'Symbolism at the Periphery: Yeats, Maeterlinck, and Cultural Nationalism', *Comparative Literature Studies*, 42 (3) (2005) pp. 183-204.
- <sup>42</sup> Sherry, *Modernism*, p. 81.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>44</sup> Oscar Wilde, *Irish Poets and Poetry of the Nineteenth Century* (A Lecture Delivered in Platt's Hall, San Francisco on Wednesday April Fifth, 1882). Edited from Wilde's Manuscript and Reconstructed, in part, from contemporary newspaper accounts with an introduction and biographical notes by Robert D. Pepper (San Francisco, California: The Book Club of California, 1972) p. 27.

<sup>45</sup> Oscar Wilde, A Note on Some Modern Poets, reprinted in *Ellmann, The Artist as critic: critical writings of Oscar Wilde* (Random House: New York, 1969) p. 99.

<sup>46</sup> William Butler Yeats wrote to T. Sturge Moore in May 1906: 'The general construction is all right, even powerful, but the dialogue is empty, sluggish, pretentious. It has nothing of drama of any kind, never working to any climax but always ending as it began. [...] His Salome is as level as a table. Wilde [sic] was not a poet but a wit & critic & could not endure his limitations' in *The Collected Letters of W. B. Yeats: Volume IV, 1905-1907*, ed. John Kelly, Eric Domville and Ronald Schuchard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) p. 399.

<sup>47</sup> This 'mysterious, strange and admirable Salomé, [...] this dream whose power I have not yet explained to myself'. Ibid., p. 399.

<sup>48</sup> Cited in Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde*, p. 354.

<sup>49</sup> Yeats, *Collected Letters*, p. 399.

<sup>50</sup> Noreen Doody, *The Influence of Oscar Wilde on W.B. Yeats: 'An Echo of Someone Else's Music'* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp.203 and 309.

<sup>51</sup> Matthew Sturgis, *Oscar: A Life* (London: Apollo, 2019) pp. 575-6

<sup>52</sup> Eibhear Walshe, *Oscar's Shadow: Wilde, Homosexuality and Modern Ireland* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2011), p. 4.