

The Art and Life Dichotomy: What Critics Say Is Conflicting

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Abstract: The paper discusses the dichotomy of art and life projected in the work of art and what critics say about it is conflicting. So the major objective of this paper is to explore the fact that the writers do not depict the life as it is, but their characters always exist representing their life. The writers, thus, write about their self, often their conflicting personality that is reflected in their works of art. It is often called autobiography. Oscar Wilde's *Salomé* is one of the examples of this sort. He is successful as a self-dramatist that his play is a portrayal of his true self that directs the form of autobiography. In addition, the great drama of his life is, as Andre Gide argues, that he has put his genius in his life but only his talent into his works.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Many critics think that the art should be separated from the artist, but many disagree that there is a connection between the two. As such, Oscar Wilde's *Salomé* always invites the conflicting interpretations. For instance, many critics agree that his divided selves are reflected in it. He has not made the slightest attempt to see his life as unity and to describe it in term of spiritual growth. In this sense, his work is not an account of the author's life at all; it is no more than a string of reflections, recollections, and anecdotes. In many cases, a number of them hardly draw the attention of the readers. In contrast, he does not depict the life as it is, but his characters always existing in their relation to him. So only through such portrayal of anecdotes, the readers can find his expression of his art and personality strung together.

The qualities necessary for writing a valuable autobiography are not common, and rarely accompany other forms of literary or poetic genius. There is no reason to expect that Wilde would produce, at the end of his life, poetic autobiography that would commensurate with his genius and personality. There is therefore no legitimate ground for disappointment at finding his dramatic work *Salomé* to contain little more than rambling reminiscences of certain periods in the author's life, agreeable and interesting in them. But they are loosely strung together without any historical form or grip, and adding little import to the knowledge of him that can be derived from reading his work.

The meaning of the work, thus, lies outside of it, in some moral proposition which it merely illustrates to locate reality in human action. As the autobiographers write about the self, they come across certain difficulties and dangers while writing for the stage. Wilde, in his play, is dominated by a pervasive feeling of guilt, damnation and a forbidding of tragic failure and it, as Juan (1967) points out, is initiated by the apprehension – “. . . the truths of the self no longer coincide with the facts of the ordinary world, the experience culminates in the tension of the "two voices" that drives the individual to ultimate withdrawal, indifference, or surrender to some absolute creed, religious or secular” (p. 9). Here, one falls into certain conflicts which mar the effect of the work. But Wilde's autobiography came to the conclusion that the conflict within him can be reconciled only in the verbal action precipitated by the conflict.

This is how Wilde's *Salomé* dismisses the assumption that an absolute self precedes and governs individual experience and can be discerned through the same experience. This assumption, as Spengemann (1980) argues, has enabled "historical autobiographers to explain, philosophical autobiographers to search for, and poetic autobiographers to express, the absolute self behind their conditioned actions", and in this situation, "every individual action is artistic" (p. 167). Because when one identifies the self there is a kind of psychic creation which is called the character. Collingwood (1938), a philosopher, comments upon the artist's concern for knowledge –

Theoretically, the artist is a person who comes to know himself, to know his own emotion. This also knows his world, that is, the sights and sound and so forth which together make up his total imaginative experience. The two knowledges are to him one knowledge, because these sights and sounds are to him steeped in the emotion with which he contemplates them: they are the language in which that emotion utters itself to his consciousness. His world is his

language. What it says to him it says about himself: his imagination vision of is his self-knowledge. (p. 291)

Knowing of oneself is also a making of oneself of one's world, the self which is psyche being remade in the shape of consciousness? Thus, everyone who writes is an artist and spends the life in drawing an original portrait of him or her.

Wilde's art, as well as his public persona, is founded on a critique of the manic Victorian urge to antithesis, an antithesis not only between all things English and Irish, but also between male and female, master and slave, god and evil. This leads him a step towards selfhood. Since self-consciousness is the essence of autobiography, the autobiographer focuses his attention upon himself and his activities. So, in the play, whenever he is most stridently denied, the self-conflict always ends up setting the agenda of its creator – who, being unaware of it, becomes its unconscious slave, Worth (1983) writes on the matter, “It would be hard, of course, to present *Salomé* without some sense of its scenic symbolism; in the plays of modern life. Seems visual hints are more easily overlooked” (p. 188). Wilde advances the same argument when he says that the more imitative an art is, the less it expresses its time and place: what compels belief in self-portrait is not its fidelity to the subject as much as its embodiment of the artist. Symbolist as he is, he thus early becomes conscious of a power within him which he cannot control but which is an infallible guide to him in his art.

II. EARLY CRITICS ON *SALOMÉ*

Wilde's *Salomé*, one-act play originally written in French, was first published in 1893 and an English translation by Lord Alfred Douglas with the Beardsley illustrations in 1894. When asked how he had come to write this play in French, his reply was –

I have one instrument that I know 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 . . . great deal of the curious effect that Maeterlinck produces comes from the fact that he, a Flamand by race, writes in an alien language. (Wilde, 1927, p. 20)

Immediately after its publication, the play was performed on stage in London at the Place Theatre with Sarah Bernhardt in the title role. But the Lord Chamberlain refused a license, under an old law prohibiting the representation of biblical characters on the stage.

Worth (1983), reacting impulsively to the ban, considers, “the French seized the opportunity to mock English philistinism, proving their own superiority in this respect by allowing the first performance of the play in Paris” (p. 52). In the same way, Archer (n.d.) protests against the banning of *Salomé* and thus writes, “Ever since Mr. Oscar Wilde told me, a fortnight ago, a fortnight ago, that his *Salomé* has been accepted by Madame Sarah Bernhardt, I have been looking forward, with a certain malign glee, to the inevitable suppression of the play Great irresponsibility” (para. 12). Wilde (1962) who himself stands for Archer's favour writes a letter to him that reads, “The refusal of the Licensor to allow the performance of my tragedy was based entirely on his silly vulgar rule about no Biblical subject being treated” (p. 319). In 1896, however, it was performed by Lugue Poe at the Theatre de L'Oeuvre in Paris when Wilde was in prison.

The play was not staged in London until 1931. Instead, its success came from outside from productions and adaptations abroad, from St. Petersburg to Paris to New York. In Germany, Richard Strauss used it in 1905 as the libretto for his opera. Even in his foreign land, Wilde was second only to Shakespeare in popularity as an English dramatist.

Wilde is a born dramatist as he is naturally equipped with certain valuable gifts for writhing for the stage. This attitude towards the theatre is utterly different from his contemporaries. He wrote plays frankly for the market. At that time, writing plays for the stage was lucrative. But the only one of his plays which seems to be written with conviction, because he has something to express and because the dramatic form seems to him the right one in which to express it, in his play *Salomé*. When he wrote it, it was not with a view to its ever being performed and so his genius had free scope. He was writing to please himself not to please the manager and the audience, and the result is that is among his best plays.

Wilde's *Salomé* did not go unrecognized by its early reviewers. The critics have repeatedly acknowledged its originality, genius, and imaginative power although some of them have also complained about its moral confusion. Still other critics were troubled by their inability to discover the meaning of his text, especially, a meaning which has coincided with their sense of the nineteenth-century Victorian Society. Defending against such critics, many others considered the play useless or immoral or undesirable. Yet other critics had shifting questions which we still ask today: what does *Salomé* mean? How can we interpret it? Is it an exclusive play?

As a result, there is uncertainly, at least difference of opinion critics have on the kind of play Wilde wrote. Since the publication of *Salomé*, different critics have attempted to review it using a variety of critical approaches. Nevertheless, the early criticism of the play during Wilde's life-time and for two decades or so after

his death, has flowed steadily focusing on the over-repeated details of the author's life or times rather than the quality of a literary work which is to be judged on literary grounds alone. For instance, *The Times* (1893) is among the first to criticize the play shortly after the play's publication in its reviews –

This is the play, written for Mme Sarah Bernhardt, which the Lord Chamberlain to license for performance in this country. It is an arrangement in blood and ferocity, morbid, bizarre, repulsive, and very offensive in its adaptation of scriptural phraseology to situations the reverse of sacred. It is not ill - suited to some of the less attractive phases of Mme Bernhardt's dramatic genius, and it is vigorously written in some parts. As a whole, it does credit to Mr. Wilde's command of the French language, but we must say that the opening scene reads to us very like a page from one of Ollendorff's exercises. (p. 133)

The opinions of English critics on a French work of Wilde reveal little inclination towards appreciation. To such complaint of the plays coarseness and inappropriateness, Wilde (1962) writes thus in response to the editor of *The Times* and apparently intends to counter potentially hostile review of his play –

The fact that the greatest tragic actress of any stage now living saw in any play such beauty that she was anxious to produce it, to take herself the part of the heroine, to lend to the entire poem the glamour of her personality, and to my prose the music of her flute-like voice – this was naturally, and always will be, a source of pride and pleasure to me, and I look forward with delight to seeing Mme Bernhardt present my play in Paris, that vivid centre of art, where religious dramas are often performed. Bu my play was in no sense of the words written for this great actress. I have never written a play for any actor, nor shall I ever do so. Such work is for the artisan in literature – not for the artist. (p. 336)

This is how his attention has been drawn to such a review of the play and asks it to correct a misstatement that appears in the review in question.

Aubrey Beardsley, an artist-critic, provides a famous set of illustrations to the published text *Salomé* that include within them caricatures of Wilde himself as Herod. The illustrations are too well-known to need more than a passing reference. In the world of art criticism, they excited almost as such attention as the play has excited in the world of intellect. Here, a point has been made, and it is one that implicates him in his work in a way that he should surely have been prepared to admit when Wilde (1962) states in a letter to John Lane –

The cover of *Salomé* is quite dreadful. Don't spoil a lovely book. Have simply a folded vellum wrapper with the design in scarlet –much cheaper, and much better. The texture of the present cover is coarse and common: it is quite impossible and spoils the real beauty of the interior. Use up this horrid Irish stuff for stories, etc,: don't inflict it on a work of art like *Salomé*. It really will do you a great deal of harm. Everyone will say that it is coarse and inappropriate. I loathe it so does Beardsley. (p. 348)

What made the fame of the book were the illustrations by Beardsley, of course, but Wilde did not like them at all. In this connection, Laver (1954), a biographer-critic, opines that certainly the Beardsley illustrations to *Salomé* have added an extra touch of Satanism to the book which does Wilde's reputation little good (p. 21).

What Wilde's *Salomé* receives from the early critics is a hostile review of it. The play on its first performance was grudgingly praised because of its obvious success that could not be ignored, but on its subsequent publication in the book form it was violently assailed. As notably Ross (1969), a literary journalist and art-critic, is at pains to support as he observes, "On its publication in 1896, it was greeted with greater abuse than any other of Wilde's works, and was consigned to the usual irrevocable oblivion" (p. viii). It means that there are also many critics who did not praise the work positively when it was performed on the stage. In addition, an important mode to criticism has focused on literary sources for the play. "Flaubert, Maeterlinck (some would add Ollendorff) and Scripture," according to Ross (1969), "are the obvious sources on which he has freely drawn for what I do hesitate to call the most powerful and perfect of all dramas" (p. x).

It is equally appropriate, however, that a strong nineteenth-century intellectual tradition, that is psychoanalysis, contributes to early criticism of *Salomé*. Psychoanalysis began, of course, later in the nineteenth century with the pioneering theoretical work of Sigmund Freud and others of his time. Joyce (1980), a psychoanalyst critic, aptly describes *Salomé* as "a polyphonic variation on the report of art and nature, but at the same time a revelation of his own psyche" (p. 205). According to Joyce, the plot and the characters presented in the play are close to the author's psychological state.

III. MODERN CRITICS ON SALOMÉ

Modern criticism of Wilde's *Salomé* focuses on the quality of the play which is to be examined and evaluated on literary grounds alone. For instance, new critical approaches have proved the necessary prelude to the modern upward reevaluation of his achievement. As a result, the modern criticism has allowed readers and critics to see and admire more of his art.

Wilde's contribution to English literature is, certainly, the most remarkable furnished by any author of his generation. He is one of the most brilliantly gifted literary person that England ever produced. As Laver

(1954), a critic, summarizes Wilde's background and achievement and then analyzes what is most significant in his work of art –

As a literary-historical figure Wilde's place is unique. He stood, as he himself claimed, in a symbolic relation to his age. Without him neither of the Aesthetic Movement of the 'Eighties, nor the Decadent Movement of the 'Nineties can be understood. He has his permanent niche in the literature of England and in the literature of the world. (p. 26)

Thus, Wilde's attitude in writing is incalculable in the sense that he still occupies an important position in literary and intellectual history of England. However, the statement tends to praise him in general terms rather than look specifically at his literary art.

Juan (1967), like the New Critics, pays close attention to the formal elements of *Salomé*. The formal elements such as setting, symbol, tension, metaphor, motif and imagery that help us seek the aesthetic unity and inherent meaning of the play. He focuses on such elements in the play as critical choice influenced by the New Criticism's initial concern with the study of poetry and by the critical tradition that treats the play as a "poetic" drama, as considered the fusion of prose poem and dramatic situation. As he precisely observes the play, "It exploits the Biblical style that Wilde polished and thickened in his prose poems and fairy tales. Wilde also employs multiple parallelism that dictate a slow, fluent evolution of image and idea in soliloquy or conversation (pp. 113-13). Obviously, what gives unity to *Salomé* in here is the tone and texture of its language. Juan (1967) argues that Wilde handles the course of feelings of the characters in the play by the principle of implied relations analogous to the technique of Hebrew poetry (p. 114). In a sense, it juxtaposes ideas as his relations are expressed with hardly any of the connectives that usually bind thought-units in a normal sentence.

The play, thus, can be seen not only as a "beautiful coloured, musical thing" in Wilde's phrase, but also as an instance of particular situations invented for a particular problem of dramatic expression. The play maintains the dramatic action as Juan (1967) argues, "Even if they did not all succeed in providing new forms and modes, they at least posed the difficulties in a stronger, clearer fashion" (p. 128). In short, Juan is trying to say that Wilde's limited but unique success should ultimately be measured according to the degree in which he becomes able to objectify in image and action, enveloping the whole work and creating the atmosphere proper to it.

Similarly, analyzing the formal elements of the play, Clark (1938) argues that Wilde's *Salomé* is a rich and ornate picture which is written for the purpose of displaying a neat and well-balanced plot, but more specially to exhibit the poet's virtuosity in writing of a coloured and rhythmic language (p. 244). Since the dramatist in writing a one-act play cannot afford much space for lengthy exposition, he often sums it up in a few pages or even a few lines. So the exposition of the play is not in the usual form; it is largely done in a more or less summary fashion. The sort of exposition Wilde used, according to Clark (1938), is talky which is interrupted by the voice of Jokanaan, in this respect, he claims, "It retards the action, yet in a poetic way some allowance may be made for the decorative aspect of the piece, the inherent beauty of the words, and we are willing to have the atmosphere created and wait for the entrance of Salomé herself before the story is appreciably advanced" (p. 245). In the play, therefore, the first eight or ten pages are taken up with conversation carried on by the Nubian, the Cappadocian, Herodia's Page, First and Second Soldiers, and the Young Syrian.

A well-known biographer-critic Ellmann (1982), without a doubt, helps to establish a basis for the modern criticism of Wilde's *Salomé*. He approaches the play as a biographical study but focuses on Salomé character as much as on Jokanaan and Herod. He analyses the play as if the key to interpreting the play lays in real people and real events on the assumption that literary criticism can explore the relation between the play and our experiences in the world, in other words, between 'literature' and 'reality'. As Ellmann does so who calls this play an autobiographical play usually means that portions of Herod's history resemble with that of Wilde's own early experiences. It is necessary, therefore, to retrace certain of Wilde's close relationships. The genesis of the story of *Salomé* has been much debated in which many different factors are no doubt involved. Ellmann (1969), for instance, interestingly identifies the violently contrasting sexual philosophies of Ruskin and Pater as a germinating force, as he points out –

Wilde matriculated at Magdalen College, Oxford, on October 11, 1874, just before he was twenty. The two men he had most wanted to know at that time, he said, were Ruskin and Pater, both, conveniently enough, installed at the same place. He managed to meet Ruskin within a month, and though he didn't meet Pater so quickly, during his first three months at Oxford he made the acquaintance of Pater's *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, which he soon called his 'golden book' and subsequently referred to in a portentous phrase as "that book which has had such a strange influence over my life." (pp. 75-76)

Wilde, thus, was as concerned for his social as for his body, and however titillated he was by Pater, he looked to Ruskin for spiritual guidance. Ruskin and Pater are, for Wilde, at first imagined, and then actual figures. Then they came to stand heraldically, burning unicorn and an inflamed satyr, in front of two portals of his mental

theatre. Ellmann (1969) argues that Wilde sometimes allowed them to battle, at other times tried to reconcile them (p. 86).

Wilde projects through Herod his own ambivalent attitude to the extreme represented by Jokanaan and Salomé, also his ability to maintain a safe distance from the violent beings who so attract him, Ellmann (1969) rightly adds here:

Admittedly the play takes place in Judea and not in Oxford. Wilde wanted the play to have meaning outside his own psychodrama. Yet Wilde's tutelary voices from the university, now fully identified as forces within himself, seem to be in attendance, clamoring for domination.

Both Jokanaan and Salomé are executed, however, and at the command of the tetrarch. (p. 90) Clearly, the emphasis is suddenly given to Herod at the end of the play, who yields to Salomé's sensuality and to the moral revulsion of Jokanaan from that sensuality. Here, Wilde is trying to suggest that he felt to be his own nature in Herod, projecting his own contrary impulses but not destroying the successive waves of spiritual and physical passion.

In spite of its brilliance, Wilde's *Salomé* is widely criticized as a decadent text. As for John Stokes, the play is Wilde's most extreme and personal expression of Decadent feeling (412). The Decadent is known as what Stokes (1982) calls "own demise is precipitated by uncertainties about the nature of the artistic life, and it is these that *Salomé* explores" (p. 412) In a similar way, Gallienne (1893) is also of the opinion that this play belongs to the black art because its motives are monstrous, its colour is evil, its language is lovely and accursed, the very harlotry of language (p. 2). This sort of motives, of course, powerfully establish evil as a reality in the play, but the main concern of decadent is with its own demise, as we see in the play: Jokanaan who renounces and is himself destroyed, and Salomé who destroys, consummates and is herself destroyed. In this connection, Gallienne (1893) accounts the artistic effect of it, as he remarks: "To these who take the immortality of the theme, Mr. Wilde might well ask: Is it not a virtuous act to transform evil things to beauty? Doesn't one thus, so to say, redeem them?" (p. 2). The statement as such concludes that finding beauty in destruction is certainly a decadent achievement.

Worth (1983), yet another critic, has given a new direction to *Salomé* criticism. The fact is that critics may differ in their total interpretations, most would now recognize in Wilde's writing an intellectual quality of which we have hardly a glimpse in his theatricality. Worth considers that not just *Salomé* but all the plays of Wilde show the marks of his 'total theatre' approach: colour arrangements and setting play a subtle part in his dramatic design; an interesting symbolism of place emerges, even in the seemingly realistic and mundane environment of the society plays (p. 8). Indeed, all the arts of expression are gathered together in the theatre offers Wilde an opportunity to express his vision of life as self-expression. In a sense, he plays a crucial role "to create for a 'modern' theatre a mode of express as personal as the lyric or the sonnet" (Worth, 1983, p. 22).

Wilde, who comes to write this strange play, is influenced by the symbolist writers and painters and comes to know that the stage should be 'the meeting place of all the arts'. Worth (1983) observes *Salomé* in which "Rhythm, musical language, colour, lighting, dance were to produce a concrete imaginary of the stage in a style approved by the French and Belgian symbolists" (p. 53). She, finally, summarizing this play as the product of Symbolist Movement, declares, "*Salomé* remains Wilde's master work in the symbolist mode; a spiritual concept completely realized in a dramatic structure of intense physicality and in this play 'modern' as he claimed; the first triumphant demonstration of the symbolist doctrine of total theatre" (p. 73).

There is a historically based criticism of *Salomé* that grounds interpretation on the subjects as womanliness, honors, and money. Jerkins (1991) combines politics and theatrical history with literary criticism to show the relationship between the London theatre and the Victorian realities of England. Wilde is a paradox himself who "opened Victorian drama to playfully subversive, contradictory ideas yet, in his worship of the beautiful" (p. 196).

Finding himself in difficulties with such statement of his own: "I can't get a grip of the play yet: I can't get my people real" (p. 282), Wilde (1927) pursues the perverse. For instance, Jerkins (1991) mentions,

In Paris, later that year, while wrestling with his vision of woman who dances for the blood of the man she craves, he asked the gypsy orchestra at the Grand cafe to interpret those thoughts: "And Rigo played such wild and terrible music that those who were there stopped and looked at each other with balanced faces. Then I went back and finished *Salomé*". (pp. 203-204)

Salomé, therefore, becomes one of the most theatrical of its author's dramatic works. Its successes must not be attributed to the accessory qualities such as literary style but to its inherent theatrical appeal.

Jerkins (1991) further points out that the play is as lyric and pictorial as Wilde's other romantic tragedies, but the archetypal passion of its fabled antagonists support that structure; in fact, the ornate design gives added import to those archetypes (p. 205). Without a doubt, few other one-act plays move so rhythmically straight up to a climax so well-arranged and thrilling to make *Salomé* an effective theatre piece.

A strong twentieth-century intellectual tradition, that is feminism, contributes to the most recent criticism of *Salomé*. Wilde is explicit, whether consciously or unconsciously, on issues that the nineteenth-

century education or a profession. However, modern feminist interpretation of his play is especially keen in its understanding of sexual desire that Victorian women felt.

Showalter (1994), a feminist critic, attempts to revise orthodox male literary history that exposes sexual stereotypes in canonical texts and reinterpreting the work of women writers. In regard to *Salomé*, she points out that the critical history of *Salomé* as closet drama, stage play, opera, ballet and film over the last century has always been linked with Wilde's homosexuality and with "Post-Freudian" issues of fetishism and perversion (p. 13).

However, Showalter (1994) thinks that the legend of *Salomé* has been given a central place to represent female desire and shifting political and sexual contexts have influenced modern productions which have not only raised issues of homosexuality, but also of anti-Semitism (p. 13). Paying tribute to the influence of the *Salomé* legend on the style and packing of modern sex symbols, she claims, "No matter how you slice it, boys, it's still *Salomé*. Of course, each boy slices the *Salomé* in his own peculiar way" (Showalter, 1994, p. 13). *Salomé*, for Showalter (1994), is the grandma of all; that is, the existence of a distinctly feminine mode of experience or subjectivity. And she concludes her essay by starting that *Salomé* has always been the site for debates about sexuality, transgression, and sexual difference (p. 14).

Finally, more than any other modes the recent criticism, i.e. cultural criticism, has cut across and drawn on multiple and contradictory traditions whilst presenting what are arguably a challenge to critical orthodoxies. The cultural critics argue that it has emerged as shared activities with one or more established disciplines such as music, photography, fashion-design, history, politics, philosophy, and so on. For this reason, they have mixed and matched the most revealing analytical procedures developed in a variety of discipline, discarding the rest.

It is appropriate, then, one modern tradition of interpreting Wilde's *Salomé* derives from culture criticism, in this case, includes photographs, illustration, drawings, etc. The culture in question becomes a copy or the photographer's creation rather than an original that photography has copied imperfectly. The play is, after all, a play; and photographs, illustrations, and drawings are, to some extent, produced by a culture. For instance, Aubrey Beardsley's illustration for the original publication establishes many of themes, especially the elements of the sexual, aesthetic, and exotic. Wilde sets the play in 'a great terrace in the palace of Herod', but Beardsley's illustrations suggest that *Salomé* is staged in a theatre of the author's mind, are extended fantasy or projection.

Similarly, Holland (1994) whose identification of a female opera singer as the true subject of the mysterious photograph of "Oscar Wilde as *Salomé*" (p. 14), which appears in Ellmann's great biography in 1987 has indeed scotched a potent academic myth, as Holland (1994) himself comments,

It seemed almost too good to be true when it appeared in Richard Ellmann's biography a picture of Oscar Wilde in drag as *Salomé*. The rounded chin, the heavy eyelids, the soft-looking, unmuscular flesh betraying the life of indulgence which he was known to be leading by 1891, when the play was written, all weighed heavily in favour of its authenticity. At the time of publication doubts were voiced, mostly among the old hands in Wilde studies, but no one was anxious to put them in print. About the photograph, captioned unequivocally "Wilde in Costume as *Salomé*", the text remained silent. (p. 14)

To have what seems like visual evidence to Wilde's most decadent heroine is an imaginative creation of Wilde. Many critics are quick to reproduce the photo of fleshy and bejeweled "Wilde as *Salomé*" kneeling, arms outstretched, before a large and heavy head. Showalter (1991) writes in reference to Holland's identification which established "beyond the shadow of a doubt that the photographs" depicts not Wilde but the Hungarian soprano Alice Guszalewicz in a performance of the Strauss *Salomé* in 1906 (pp. 439-447). In these photographs, Guszalewicz has the some features and, more important, is dressed identifiably to the figure in the "Wilde as *Salomé*" photograph.

The academic works at first approached Ellmann's "Wilde as *Salomé*" photograph with caution, but the temptation to believe it seems to have proved irresistible. Holland's remark on the matter runs as follows, Showalter (1991) reproduces it in *Sexual Anarchy: : Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siecle* in support of her reading of *Salomé*'s love for Jokanann as "veiled homosexual desire," adding inexplicably that the picture was taken in Paris in the 1980s" (pp. 439-447). Holland, thus, gives fascinating, if admittedly unwelcome, answers to the question raised by the Ellmann photograph. But his hint that contemporary critical readings of *Salomé* as a story of veiled homosexual desire depend on the photograph needs some response. On the basis of these photographs, Holland (1994) notes, "a whole new branch of Post-Freudian Wilde research might have been launched" (p. 14). Hence, Wilde becomes one of the most celebrated figures in regard to his photographs.

Wilde imagined *Salomé* as an aesthetic *tour de force*, and devoted a great deal of time to discussion of its staging with his designers Charles Ricketts, Gustav Moreau and Lindsay Kemp. Yet he never saw the play performed. Indeed, Worth (1983) is among other scholars who produces the photographs from the production of these theatergoers as she notes, "Wilde set about designing a method for making more subtle use of the physical elements of theatre. He is helped by the ideas on the dramatic potentiality of clothes, décor and music that were

in the air during the 1880s" (p. 8). Thus, Worth means to say that Wilde is an actor himself besides he is a great dramatist of the time.

On the present day stage, the role of Salomé is played by a series of dancers and actresses who came into conflict with homophobia, misogyny, and prudery. Similarly, *Salomé* seems to have been a choice vehicle for Wilde to reveal his most personal and deepest feelings about the wonders of erotic and the sheer delights of the male body.

IV. CONCLUSION

The above discussion of *Salomé* concludes that the critics can help us in many ways. They lead us back to the play itself and leave us there to make our own discovery of it that is also worth keeping in mind what Wilde (1992) wrote in his preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, "When critics disagree the artist is in accord with himself" (p. 17). Wilde's assertion adds a new dimension to the meaning of *Salomé* as a poetic autobiography because most critics overlooked one the curial reading/ interaction of this little piece while arguing over other issues.

The case in point may be unapproachable, but they make either biographing or criticizing Wilde's *Salomé* a tricky business. As everyone dramatizes himself, this is one source of his attraction. He plays his creative part in a stunning manner with an instinct for the theoretical potential of self-portrayal which is distinct in his play.

Wilde, then, is successful as a self-dramatist that we get a little sense of the true self that directs the autobiography. Moreover, the great drama of his life, he tells Gide (1951), is that he has put his genius in his life but only his talent into his works (p. 29). The fact that while all sort of critics debate the dichotomy between art and life in the text, Wilde's *Salomé* remains always a hot issue. Thus, as Saltus (1937) claims, "*Salomé* is not art merely, it is unique, a thing apart" (p. iv).

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