

**Exceptional Mental Health in Oscar Wilde's *Salomé*:
A Reevaluation of the Play's Ethos**

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I am more and more convinced that the world tends to become more comfortable for the mass, and more and more uncomfortable for those of any natural gift or distinction – and it is well perhaps that it should be so – for hitherto the gifted have astonished and delighted the world, but not tried or inspired or in any real way changed it.

(Matthew Arnold)

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Introduction

In much of the literature produced in Britain towards the end of the nineteenth century we find a heightened interest in the description of an inherently dysfunctional universe. This preoccupation has naturally had a bearing on our conception of the “spirit of the age.” Traditionally, the 1890s have been seen as a period of decadence, an era in which the general artistic mood was characterised by morbidity, disillusion and pessimism.

An assessment of this kind seems to be based on the assumption that the atmosphere pervading a work of art is to be taken as a direct reflection of the artist’s state of mind. If this conjecture were accurate (and it obviously is not), this would have significant implications for the field of ethical criticism with its focus on morality in and through literature. Fortunately, more and more literary critics have come to realise that an author’s “ethos” or “collection of habitual characteristics” (Booth 8) is not confined to fictional content alone, but that it is equally present in every formal choice made in the composition of a work. While the concept of morality *in* literature stands for ethical solutions achieved within an entirely fictional, closed pseudo-social network, morality *through* literature is concerned with the communication of ethical values on a different level of discourse, taking place within a separate network consisting of implied author and implied reader. The difference is a crucial one. Ethical solutions which bring stability in a specific fictional setting are not necessarily presented as generally adaptive on the author–reader level of discourse. A critic interested in the ethics of fiction must therefore pay attention not only to ethical choices made within the story itself, but also to ethical choices made by the implied author on a structural and stylistic level. Such a double analysis can reveal parallels, but also marked differences between the “mood” prevalent in the created fictional “reality” and the ethos displayed by the implied author when addressing the implied reader. Even a dysfunctional universe can be described in a functional way, and the teller of a sad tale might wish his listeners just as well as the teller of a happy one.

Oscar Wilde must be considered one of the major victims of the aforementioned misconception. Whereas his sincerity as a social reformer and his humanist intentions have been acknowledged with respect to his essays (Bashford), the dysfunctional nature of the universe presented in Wilde’s fiction has given him the air of an ironical spectator of human affairs, a writer lacking any serious convictions or real involvement with his art and his readers. Sadly, this light-hearted interpretation has led to the slighting of his arguably finest work of art, the symbolist drama *Salomé*. Since enquiries into the ethos of Wilde’s tragedy have hitherto confined themselves to an analysis of the plot, many critics do not manage to incorporate their

interpretation of the play's alleged ethics into their overall conception of Wilde's authorship. The history of *Salomé's* reception is a history of perpetual uneasiness and bewilderment.

In my thesis, I will use Oscar Wilde's drama *Salomé* as an example of how a writer deliberately employs a discrepancy between "artistic" and fictional mood in order to achieve certain ethical effects *through* literature. In performing a double analysis of the play's fictional as well as structural ethos, I aim to make visible the encouraging and hopeful mood underlying Wilde's portrayal of a dysfunctional world, as well as the impressive empathic understanding the implied author displays in his treatment of the subject matter. A disparity between fictional ethos and structural ethos, as can be observed in *Salomé*, is still a very rare phenomenon in literature, and the critics' puzzlement over Wilde's writing method is understandable. Even so, an awareness of this phenomenon can contribute enormously to our future estimation of literature, and it can grant us access to many "difficult" works of art. Upon the publication of *Salomé* in 1893, Max Beerbohm remarked: "In construction it is very much like a Greek play, I think: yet in conception so modern that its publication in any century would seem premature. It is a marvellous play" (Beckson 134). More than a hundred years after *Salomé* was written, it is high time that its readers should come of age.

The Ethics of Fiction: Who Decides How Best to Live?

That fiction makes explicit or implicit statements about ethical questions has been much discussed by philosophers and literary critics alike. Theorists like Catherine Wilson are convinced of literature's capacity to effect practical changes in the life of the reader, by achieving "a modification of a person's concepts, which is in turn capable of altering his thought or conduct" (qtd. in Lamarque and Olsen 378). The philosopher Martha C. Nussbaum holds the view that certain works of literature contribute to "the exploration of some important questions about human beings and human life" (5) and that "certain truths about human life can only be fitting and accurately stated in the language and form of the narrative artist" (5). However, there is a continuing debate about how far the moral value of these literary works contributes to, or even constitutes, their aesthetic value.

The literary critics Lamarque and Olsen are opposed to the idea of "philosophy *through* literature," to the extent in which "literary works are subordinated to the function and purpose of philosophical argument, and the focus of interest is consequently on the way in which an imaginatively realized fictive situation can throw light on a moral problem and not on the way in which a literary work redefines and develops these conceptions in a fundamentally different *literary* way" (391-92). Their criticism would be warranted if philosophical "argument" was

confined to the conveyance of explicit or implicit philosophical propositions on the fictional level. Yet, as Nussbaum is well aware, also stylistic choices are inherently value-laden:

A view of life is *told*. The telling itself – the selection of genre, formal structures, sentences, vocabulary, of the whole manner of addressing the reader’s sense of life – all of this expresses a sense of life and of value, a sense of what matters and what not, of what learning and communicating are, of life’s relations and connections. Life is never simply *presented* by a text; it is always *represented as* something. This “as” can, and must, be seen not only in the paraphrasable content, but also in the style, which itself expresses choices and selections, and sets up, in the reader, certain activities and transactions rather than others. (5)

This view is correct with respect to literature in general. As Axel Nissen also notes, “every narrative has an ethics, but not every narrative is about ethics” (265). In “any text carefully written and fully imagined” (4), however, Nussbaum discerns a conflation between the morality conveyed *in* and *through* the work: “Certain thoughts and ideas, a certain sense of life, reach towards expression in writing that has a certain shape and form, that uses certain structures, certain terms” (4-5). Unfortunately, Nussbaum remains rather vague about what exactly this “certain” sense of life is supposed to consist in, let alone what structures an author might employ to convey this sense of life to his reader. One has to conclude, therefore, that the philosophical approach to literature remains impractical (Lamarque and Olsen 397), as long as it does not propose any method or tool to be used in an analysis of the ethical dimension of literary form.

On the other hand, the notion of a “certain something” connecting content and style in outstanding literary works has been shared by many literary critics throughout time, even if they differ in the expression of a common denominator as well as the formal features that are supposed to mirror it. If I. A. Richards should be right in his claim that poetry should be emotive and that it should reflect the “high moments” in the life of a poet (59), he comes very close to the notion of a preferable “mood” underlying the form of poems. Mikhail Bakhtin with his preference for the “polyphonic novel” seems to make similar claims. In my enquiry, I will thus pursue two questions. First, what is it exactly that makes the symbiosis of form and ethical content so exceptionally valuable in certain works of literature; second – after a close analysis of the play – can Oscar Wilde’s *Salomé* be granted a place in this group?

Lamarque and Olsen’s second objection to literature’s role in teaching people how to live is concerned with the problem of what constitutes objective “truth:”

[I]f literary works are construed as having the constitutive aim of advancing truths about human concerns by means of general propositions implicitly or explicitly contained in them, then one should expect some kind of supporting argument, the more so since the purported truths are mostly controversial. However, there are no such arguments or debate either in the literary work itself, or in literary criticism.” (368)

Lamarque and Olsen base their definition of “truth” on the factualness or *cognitive value* of scientific insights, and indeed a subjectively evaluative approach like Nussbaum’s cannot make any such claims about truth. In this respect, ethical criticism should be expected to experience a boost in credibility if it could back up its evaluative argument with empirical evidence. It might therefore be fruitful to examine if there is any scientific approach and answer to the question of how to live. In order to be helpful for an overall evaluation of literary value, the results of such an enquiry should be of a kind that can be applied to an analysis of literary form as well. When Wayne Booth comments on the necessity of a “fundamentally *social* psychology” (239) for an evaluation of character, he practically holds the key to solving the puzzle. Those who can give a scientifically valid answer to the question of how to live must be those who have empirically studied human interaction in groups. And indeed, these experts have already given an informative answer to the question, even though it has so far received little attention in other fields.

The family and group approach to psychology is based on the realisation that an individual is dependant on its surrounding social network for survival, identity, support, and need gratification (Walsh 79). A person’s mental health can therefore be assessed with respect to how well the individual is able to function within a given group without becoming physically and psychologically distressed. Empirical research, most notably the Timberlawn Psychiatric Research Foundation Study on families (Lewis et al.), has confirmed the existence of so-called “exceptionally healthy” people, who, in addition to being valued and respected in their community, display an abundance of well-being and generally experience less psychological stress than others. The studies revealed that these very healthy persons relate to their environment in ways fundamentally different from people with “average” or poor mental health. To their great disappointment – but probably not surprisingly – the researchers could not find one particular denominator “causing” optimal health; instead, they found a set of several interdependent behavioural traits naturally correlating in exceptionally healthy individuals. Conversely, seen from this angle, dysfunction can be interpreted as a breach of certain “maxims” for optimal behaviour. Since “exceptional mental health” is anchored in a person’s physiological well-being, its characteristics have a biological basis and are stable over time. The findings of these studies do therefore qualify as objective scientific evidence in support of an ethical evaluation of human attitudes and actions. The family therapist Robin Skynner gives an excellent overview on the research concerning exceptional mental health in his book *Life and How to Survive It*, co-written by his former patient, the comedian John Cleese. Although (or maybe rather because) it is aimed at the layman, their book gives the most concise and comprehensible description of exceptional mental health to date. Skynner and Cleese have helped to lift the concept of mental health out of

the narrow context of psychological counselling into everyday social relationships, thereby expanding the applicability of the research from core families to human networks of all sizes.

What is so special about Skynner and Cleese's approach is their recognition that the same dynamics underlying general social interaction find their reflection in the constructed reality of works of fiction (*Families* 43-51; *Life* 15-16). Their use of literary examples to explain real-life psychological issues has made me realize that insights gained within the field of family and group psychology can be very helpful an understanding of literary creation. In particular, the research on an exceptionally healthy attitude towards one's environment proves to be valuable to ethical criticism. Since the studies in question are not so much concerned with theoretical concepts but with actual behaviour, the concise characteristics of optimal health can be used as a practical tool for evaluating not only ethical solutions arrived at on the level of the plot (which Skynner and Cleese have confined themselves to), but also the ethos reflected in the concrete formal choices employed by the implied author. In a writing situation, a writer places himself in an artificial network consisting of himself, the intended reader and, finally, the fictional creation that is presented in his work. His mental attitude will determine how he interacts with the other parties, whether he is conscious of this or not. Making a formal choice means behaving in a particular way towards the implied reader or towards the fictional world. The very structure of a work, the narrative choices that are made, the treatment of characters, the space that is given to explicit ideas, all this reflects an author's attitude towards the universe as he sees it, and towards the reader as a part of that universe. And consequently, if there is an exceptionally healthy attitude in real life, so should there be an "exceptionally healthy style" in literary production.

Skynner is aware that a person's mental health is fluctuating all the time, improving in favourable times, while involuntarily decreasing in times of stress (*Life* 5). No individual is able to display exceptional mental health constantly. As far as literature is concerned, it is the philosophical insights gained during these *high* moments of mental health that will prove to be the most rewarding to the reader. Also Richards' comment suggests that the biographical background of an artist does not necessarily have to repeat the exquisite mood of the moment when a valuable work is composed. Besides, Skynner cautions, "our level of health is not the same in all areas of our functioning. A person who is 'average' overall may be outstandingly healthy in some respects, even though functioning poorly in others" (*Life* 5). Likewise, even a generally healthy individual might have deficits in some areas of his life. In the case of literature, too, the ethics displayed in philosophical content as well as literary structure may reveal a certain degree of unevenness. All in all, there might not be any one example of a *perfect* work of art as yet, as little as there is any *perfect* specimen of the human race. Complete and constant mental

health, stable in all life circumstances, has never been attested in real life. Skynner quotes George Vaillant, the project leader of one long-term study on stress management and individual mental health: “None [of the participants] had survived the game of life without pain, effort, or anxiety” (*Life* 54). We should therefore not expect to find such perfection in literary works conceived by real people with real experiences. Instead, the most highly regarded authors will turn out to be those whose work reflects an exceptionally health attitude towards life most consistently.

What is Health?

In *Life and How to Survive It*, Skynner presents a catalogue of the interdependent behavioural characteristics that are essential to exceptional mental health in social networks. I will discuss these one by one, trying to connect them with narrative choices and techniques that can reflect an implied author’s mental health on a structural level. For an evaluation of ethical choices on a fictional level, I found Virginia Satir’s book *Conjoint Family Therapy* equally helpful, although her ideas are a little more difficult to transfer to formal choices. My analysis of Wilde’s *Salomé* will therefore primarily be based on Skynner’s ideas about exceptional mental health, but I will supplement him with other theorists where more precision is necessary. The following discussion of stylistic features can of course only serve as a starting point for further inquiry; the list is by no means exhaustive.

To start with, very healthy people have been found to be “unusually positive in their attitude to life and other people. In general, they give the impression of enjoying themselves, enjoying each other, and especially of reaching out and being friendly to the people around them” (*Life* 5). This friendliness is explicitly non-manipulative; healthy individual have no desire to exploit other people: “It’s much more as if they have such an abundance of well-being and enjoyment that they can just afford to be generous” (*Life* 7). In a separate article, Skynner gives this character trait the catchy name “affiliative attitude towards human encounter” (“Open-Systems” 45), which is the term I will use throughout my analysis. On a structural level in literature, this affiliative attitude is primarily reflected in the implied author’s general, non-manipulative interest in his own characters. Are they given the opportunity to display an individual personality or do they simply function as a foil? Also the implied author’s willingness to arrange interpersonal encounters on a fictional level deserves attention. Skynner mentions the high level of initiative in very healthy individuals (“Open-Systems” 45). Does the implied author base human encounters on individual initiative? How is the outcome of human interaction portrayed? Does it eventually pay off for a character to reach out and be friendly to others on a fictional level?

Exceptionally healthy friendliness is not to be confused with naiveté, however. On the contrary, an important characteristic of healthy people is their sense of realism, as opposed to a one-sided optimistic or pessimistic view of the world. Well-functioning individuals “see the world as it really is, without distorting it to suit their own imaginations” (*Life* 6). Such realism furthermore includes a high degree of self-knowledge and self-acceptance. Healthy people hold the “belief that people’s basic needs and drives are not evil. . . . Sexuality, anger, envy, they’re all regarded as a part of human experience. Similarly . . . it’s accepted that they feel ambivalence about people or events . . . that is, positive and negative feelings about them at the same time” (*Life* 26-27). It is the understanding of all the facets of human behaviour which renders a positive attitude possible in the first place: “They know people can be good and bad, so they’re not easily deceived. But they accept people as they are, taking the rough with the smooth. And they’ll tend to give the benefit of the doubt to people who appear unfriendly at first. They’ll reach out to strangers in an open and accepting way and won’t immediately withdraw if they don’t get a warm response back” (*Life* 6). What is very important is that such realism also includes an acute self-awareness as to one’s own qualities and limitations (*Life* 31). The degree to which in a literary text reflects realistic perceptions shows itself primarily in character building. What aspects of human nature are incorporated into the composition of fictional characters? Are they round or flat? Are they encouraged to self-reflection by the implied author?

Another aspect of exceptional mental health concerns the way in which decisions are taken in a healthy network. While there is a strong and respected leadership, everyone is consulted when decisions are to be made. Leaders do not stretch their authority beyond the right to have the final word. Skynner’s application of family dynamics to business companies (*Life* 120) is intriguing, as this somehow parallels the writer’s situation. If from a reader’s perspective, stories are “the company we keep” (Booth x), they are – from a writer’s perspective – “the company we run.” As the creator of a fictional network, the implied author employs his characters in order to deliver a product to the reader, and his attitude towards decision-making will be visible in his treatment of these characters. Does an omniscient narrator talk and think on behalf of his creation or are they allowed to speak for themselves? Does he even introduce ideas into the text which are not supposed to be compatible with the implied author’s overall ideology, as Bakhtin suggests with respect to Dostoevsky’s literary style (5)?

Open and direct communication is the next characteristic of exceptional mental health. The conviction that none of one’s feelings can be the cause of shame induces healthy individuals to communicate and negotiate with others in a direct, open, and honest way. They feel that they have nothing to hide that their environment could not handle. In addition, individuals in healthy

networks “have great respect for everybody’s world view. Each person’s subjective opinion is given house-room, and people are allowed to disagree” (*Life* 27). Conflicts are resolved as they arise, thus preventing long-term resentment caused by unexpressed opinions and feelings. Not surprisingly, open communication makes individuals acquainted with each other’s perspective, and helps them thus to understand each other better. At the same time, an environment that encourages individuals to speak their minds without fear counteracts well-meaning tendencies of “people speaking for each other, with everybody mind-reading everybody else and getting it wrong” (*Life* 28). Communication is probably the aspect of mental health which is most easily accepted as relevant for literary criticism. The implied author’s communicative abilities manifest themselves both on a fictional as well as a structural level. In what way are openness, directness, and honesty encouraged among the fictional characters? Does open communication pay off for a character on a fictional level? Also the clarity of the implied author’s language deserves attention. How direct is the implied author in conveying his ideas to the implied reader? The degree of openness in this respect reflects either the implied author’s own ability to deal with certain topics, or at least his estimation of his reader’s capacity for directness.

One particular aspect of openness is the extent to which healthy people find an outlet for their emotions, even uncomfortable ones. Skynner postulates that “[w]hen you’re given a lot of freedom and encouragement, yet also feel contained and supported, you learn to express your energy outwardly, fully and freely, without fearing the consequences” (*Life* 30). Throughout my analysis, I will use the term “transparency” to cover the combined aspects of openness, expressiveness, and action resolution. An implied author’s attitude towards transparent behaviour is reflected in the role which action in general plays in a work of fiction, as well as in the way in which fictional characters are structurally allowed to manifest their emotions. Since art itself serves as an outlet for the author’s emotions without him having to fear the consequences, the aspect of transparency in works of fiction always involves some self-reflection on his part concerning the communicability of his own impulses.

Another feature of optimal health is the individuality and autonomy of members in a social network, i.e. their “confidence and ability to function independently” (*Life* 25). Realistic perceptions of one’s own abilities and the acceptance of one’s limitations should enable an individual to develop a stable identity with high self-esteem, and consequently carry their share of responsibility within the network. Along with this goes a respect for other people’s individuality, autonomy and separateness. This aspect of health plays an important role in literary communication, as it pervades the writing situation throughout. Besides, autonomy is an area where optimal functioning is difficult to simulate. Does the implied author’s attitude towards the

reader leave room for disagreement? In what way does the implied author attempt to manipulate the reader's reception of the story? Often, the mode of functioning on a fictional level is in accordance with the implied author's own mode of functioning. Is individuality encouraged on the level of the story? Do characters make decisions on behalf of others, and does the structure of the text evaluate such behaviour?

Where healthy people diverge most strongly from people with average health is in the role which they assign to love relationships in their lives. For them, states Skynner, love "involves closeness *and* distance. They're capable of great intimacy and affection; but they also feel self-sufficient and confident and free, so they don't need each other desperately. When they're apart, they can cope perfectly well; indeed, they can enjoy themselves thoroughly" (*Life* 10). This "independent" love is connected to the enhanced self-esteem of both partners. Due to their positive attitude towards people in general, they do not have to base their identity and self-esteem on the feedback of one person alone: "The happiness the relationship brings is a luxury, a bonus. So the rest of their life isn't spoiled by fear it might go wrong, by worry about how they would manage if they lost their partner. And of course, the more you can enjoy life and feel confident when you're on your own, the more interesting a person you become, and the more you have available to share with the partner" (*Life* 10-11). The description of love in a work of literature might be taken as a cornerstone to the overall impression of its level of maturity, as it brings together many elements of mental health. Please comment specifically on the ways in which fiction with its "idealisation of dependence" reflects the unhealthiness of our traditional concept of love (*Life* 15).

The next characteristic of exceptionally healthy people is their remarkable ability to deal with changes, even thrive on them. Skynner draws particular attention to a long-term study of Harvard students (Vaillant, *Adaptation*), in which the mental health of the participants was evaluated on the basis of the psychological coping mechanisms they employ in overcoming problems. The concept of change manifests itself in literature as much as in everyday life. How comfortable an implied author is with change becomes visible in the extent to which the circumstances within the fictional setting are presented as stable or unstable, and in the attitude which the implied author takes to this fact. To what extent are changes structurally encouraged? What coping mechanisms are presented as effective on a fictional level? Since humour is taken to be the optimal coping mechanism (*Life* 57), the implied author's sense of humour deserves special attention. It would also be fruitful to inquire whether the aspect of change is seen in a larger perspective in a work of fiction. Indeed, a belief in some sort of transcendental value system – which does not have to be traditionally religious – is an essential feature of the

exceptionally healthy frame of mind. Skynner himself admits to having been surprised by these findings. Upon John Cleese's question if it is possible to be exceptionally healthy without the sense that there is something bigger and more important than oneself, Skynner's answer is unequivocal: "I think it's impossible, almost by definition" (*Life* 35). In the light of this idea, the aspect of morality *through* literature again joins forces with morality *in* literature. We can expect that many very valuable works contain explicit philosophical statements about transcendental values *precisely because* they are implicitly structured along the guidelines of exceptional mental health.

Salomé and Wilde's Philosophy of Health

Any reader of Wilde will immediately recognize most features of exceptional mental health underlying the structure of his works. One could say that he does certain things automatically right, seemingly without any effort. But what really makes the idea of exceptional mental health almost inevitable for an analysis of his attitude as a writer is the fact that he is consciously aware of the concept with all its distinct features. In "The Soul of Man under Socialism," he puts down a catalogue of features of what he calls the "true personality of man," bafflingly close to the features of exceptional mental health, as assessed by modern empirical research:

It will be a marvellous thing – the true personality of man – when we see it. It will grow naturally and simply, flowerlike, or as a tree grows. It will not be at discord. It will never argue or dispute. It will not prove things. It will know everything. And yet it will not busy itself about knowledge. It will have wisdom. Its value will not be measured by material things. It will have nothing. And yet it will have everything, and whatever one takes from it, it will still have, so rich will it be. It will not be always meddling with others, or asking them to be like itself. It will love them because they will be different. And yet while it will not meddle with others, it will help all, as a beautiful thing helps us, by being what it is. The personality of man will be very wonderful. It will be as wonderful as the personality of a child. (*Collected Works* [CW] 1084)

Affiliative attitude, love combined with respect for separateness, realistic perceptions – the importance of these ingredients to optimal functioning have been confirmed in modern times by the aforementioned studies. In addition, Wilde demonstrates his own mental health with his belief in transcendental values – *preceding* his interest in religious issues. He continues:

In its development [the true personality of man] will be assisted by Christianity, if men desire that; but if men do not desire that, it will develop none the less surely. For it will not worry itself about the past, nor care whether things happened or did not happen. Nor will it admit any laws but its own laws; nor any authority but its own authority. Yet it will love those who sought to intensify it, and speak often of them. And of these Christ was one. (CW 1084-85)

It is important to note here that Wilde regards his ideas in themselves as a set of transcendental values, superordinate in authority even to Christianity.

With his book *Art and Christhood*, Guy Willoughby has so far offered the most accurate assessment of Wilde's ethics, by analysing the recurrence of the Christ figure in many of his works. I would like to argue, however, that the ethical propositions attributed to Christ were the closest Wilde could have come to an accepted "non-fictional" theoretical corroboration of his own argument, and that even Christ's teaching has to be bent and interpreted to convey what Wilde had in mind: "What Jesus meant was this" (CW 1085). Instead, I propose that his philosophy of the true personality of man is identical to the modern psychological concept of exceptional mental health. If the aforementioned studies on healthy behaviour can be said to constitute a theoretical argument on ethics, then Wilde's fiction serves as a literary equivalent, *Salomé* more so than anything else. Far from the concept of "art for art's sake", I propose that Wilde's play has the function of teaching the implied reader how to live, using the fictional setting and the implied author's ethos as a medium for communication.

The starting point could not have been better. At first glance, however, the prime characteristic of the fictional reality in *Salomé* seems to be that all rules of healthy behaviour are effectively violated. The characters refuse to communicate with each other, if they do not quarrel or control each other's actions; there is mutual misunderstanding in abundance; spurned lovers are unhappy and commit suicide or else demand each other's execution. Yet, the reader should not therefore assume that the implied author does not know any better. Indeed, most critics have realised this, with the effect that *Salomé* is seen as standing apart from the rest of Wilde's oeuvre. What the readings and analyses of the play have not addressed so far is the question *why* Wilde should choose to present "reality" this way, if he does not himself advocate it. Alternatively, I would like to propose that Wilde opts for an unorthodox way of promoting exceptional mental health, by presenting – in dramatically exaggerated and comprised form – the consequences of being trapped in a vicious circle of even moderate dysfunctionality. Yet, he does not simply criticise current problems without offering an alternative. As we shall see, the implied author treats his own creation as well as the implied reader in strict accordance with the guidelines for exceptional mental health, and – by way of the play's structure – this healthy behaviour tries to find its way into the fictional universe itself. An analysis of the structural ethics of *Salomé* reveals that the play's design allows for an alteration of behaviour on a fictional level, based on individual initiative. Within the story itself, it is primarily the drama's protagonist Salomé who attempts to change her universe by changing her own relation to it.

Organisation

In my thesis, I will investigate the way exceptional mental health is promoted in Oscar Wilde's *Salomé*, by tracing distinct features of the aforementioned "optimal" style in the implied author's formal choices. In addition, I will examine how and where the play's structural ethos conflates with implicit and explicit ethical propositions on a fictional level. As I take Wilde's intentions to be the ethical education of his reader rather than the mere telling of a story, I will take the liberty to violate the integrity of the textual boundaries by analysing the play's ethical dimension in connection with explicit ethical propositions advanced in other works by Wilde. In particular, I will draw the reader's attention to thematic parallels between *Salomé* and an unfinished play on the same topic, *La Sainte Courtisane*. I believe that Wilde intended this play to elaborate on certain aspects which in *Salomé* were left too vague. It also emphasises text-internal connections which are not easily visible in his earlier play. Christopher Nassaar's proposition that Wilde "trivialized [*Salomé*] in *La Sainte Courtisane* by dispelling its dark and serious atmosphere while repeating its theme" ("Courtisane" 30) suggests to me that Wilde never intended to represent the world as a "dark and serious" place in the first place.

James Hafley has to concede in his reevaluation of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* that "[t]o propose, over one hundred years after its publication, that a celebrated novel has been consistently and seriously misread – so much so that its essential meaning has not in that time been recognized by the countless persons who have discussed it – is to assume a responsibility that almost certainly can't be satisfied within the bounds of one single essay" (257). With Wilde's *Salomé* I find myself in the same situation, having only limited space to reanalyse a play from the bottom up. Nevertheless, the alternative would have been not to do it at all, and that does not sound to me like an alternative. Now that my basic argument is outlined, the reader can see many of its implications for himself. I. A. Richards puts it well when he says: "A book is a machine to think with, but it need not, therefore, usurp the functions either of the bellows or the locomotive" (1). My analysis of Wilde's play will focus on the three parameters of exceptional mental health which I take to be most central to the explicit structural ethics in *Salomé* since they are the easiest to teach, and which – taken together – allow for comprehensive enough a reassessment of the work. I will devote one chapter each to the aspects of the affiliative attitude, realistic perceptions, and transparency, on a structural as well as fictional level. Finally, the forth chapter will deal with Wilde's attempt to spread the concept of mental health to a dysfunctional environment, and the methods he applies to achieve this goal.

Chapter 1: The Affiliative Attitude in a Dysfunctional Universe

The Affiliative Author

The most immediately visible aspect of exceptional mental health is the “affiliative attitude to human encounter”: a non-manipulative appreciation of other people’s existence and a desire to seek them out. In a work of literature, this affiliative attitude manifests itself not only in the plot itself, but also on a structural level. If the fictional universe is supposed to be a mimetic representation of the mood prevalent in the real world as perceived by the writer, then the richness or poorness of the fictional setting, with regard to personae, events, and impressions, can give a good indication as to the implied author’s openness towards the world at large.

In *Salomé*, more than in any other of his works, Wilde’s representation of the world is outstanding with respect to the implied author’s interest in other people and his general openness to impressions. A one-act play, the drama nonetheless features a cast of twenty-one distinct on-stage characters with lines to speak, plus some more without a verbal contribution. As if this were not enough, reference is made to even more characters offstage. In “The Soul of Man under Socialism,” Wilde mentions that the true personality helps us “like a beautiful thing helps us, by being what it is” (CW 1084). In *Salomé*, too, the main contribution of even the minor characters to their fictional network as well as to the author-reader discourse is being what they are. The Cappadocian is just there. The only thing the Page is told to do in the course of play is to hand Herodias her fan; apart from that, he does not even attend her, but is simply there in his own right. Just like the fictional Herod treats his captive, the Young Syrian, “as my guest, as it were” (CW 562), Wilde’s characters appear like the implied author’s guests in a fictional setting; like the tetrarch, the implied author is an attentive host.

This “structural” sociability is combined with a remarkable openness to ideas and stories. In *An Ideal Husband*, Lord Goring is eager to share what is on his mind: “It is a great nuisance. I can’t find anyone in this house to talk to. And I am full of interesting information. I feel like the latest edition of something or other” (CW 537). In *Salomé*, the implied author does not leave the reader in doubt that he, too, is full of interesting information. Based on a short Biblical account concerning Herod Antipas and John the Baptist, the originally simple story of a damsel, an oath, a dance and a head on a silver platter is in Wilde’s play intertwined with and interrupted by several stories of unrequited love, discussions on the nature of God, political issues, as well as long catalogues of luxury goods. The reader learns about the religious situation in Nubia and Cappadocia, the play finds time for a brief discussion of the prophet Elias, and the Syrian’s

suicide serves as a starting point for a look at Stoics and Roman philosophers. None of these digressions is in any way necessary for the progression of the plot. For a one-act play, Wilde's drama gives house-room to a large variety of ideas and impressions, and this tendency towards expansion with regard to subject matter is supported on a formal level by the symbolist structure with its richness of association.

Self-centeredness seems to be a natural human trait, and a reader might traditionally be more familiar and comfortable with simplicity and focus, as Booth concedes (182). However, this restriction on the subject matter within a work of art gives the reader only a fragmented reflection of the world and what it contains. In *Salomé*, therefore, the implied author deliberately attempts to counteract any tendencies towards self-centeredness on a fictional level. By constantly interrupting the flow of these seemingly independent subplots, he prevents his characters from manipulating the reader into focusing on their respective individual stories at the expense of the larger picture. Everybody and everything in *Salomé* is of equal importance.

The attention which the implied author himself pays to his creation reveals a striking degree of empathy. It has to be said, however, that his fictional universe is in sore need of help and compassion. The beginning of the play conveys the sorrowful atmosphere pervading the play's setting. The Young Syrian's unfulfilled longing promises no good. The tetrarch has a sombre look. The Cappadocian's comment "I have never seen Cæsar" (CW 553) seems to suggest that the play's worldly leaders are too far off to give effective guidance to their subjects; in the meantime, the religious vacuum in people's lives reveals a profound sense of helplessness, sadness and confusion:

THE NUBIAN: The gods of my country are very fond of blood. Twice in a year we sacrifice to them young men and maidens; fifty young men and a hundred maidens. But it seems we never give them quite enough, for they are very harsh to us.

THE CAPPADOCIAN: In my country there are no gods left. The Romans have driven them out. There are some who say that they have hidden themselves in the mountains, by I do not believe in it. Three nights I have been on the mountains seeking them everywhere. I did not find them. And at last I called them by their names, and they did not come. I think they are dead. (CW 553)

Katharine Worth recognizes "in the midst of the horror" the implied author's efforts to convey Salomé's longing and despair to the reader: "if we do not feel this at the end of *Salomé* we have not experienced Wilde's play" (56). We can safely say that this comment is valid with respect to the fictional cast as a whole.

Joseph Donohue describes the fictional universe in *Salomé* as a "microcosm of the known world – depraved, unredeemed and seemingly irredeemable, despite the reputed healing and saving work of Jesus Christ and despite the presence at Herod's court of . . . Iokanaan [sic] . . . –

the harbinger of the Saviour” (“Distance” 125-26). This “world in flux,” he continues, is portrayed in a “moment of transition towards something at least as fearful as what has so far prevailed” (126). As I see it, however, the implied author clearly portrays the unknown future as a better place, where “the solitary places shall be glad” and “blossom like the lily” (CW 554). The idea of change is a recurring motif in Wilde’s play, and it is important to note that the implied author attempts to describe this aspect as positive, as it is the necessary link between the present and the – already prophesied – hopeful future. The certainty with which Jokanaan announces that the coming of a New Era *shall* happen (CW 553-4) reflects the implied author’s hopefulness about the future and his conviction about the importance of constructive change. The Nubian’s comment suggests that the ethical situation has not been any easier in the past than it is in the present. Apparently, there has never been an ideal era of the past which can be returned to. The answer to the characters’ questions must be answered by future developments, and it is the implied author’s constitutive aim to bring these developments about.

As we shall see, the later arrangement of the play’s events encourages the acquisition of exceptional mental health as an internal guide to conduct, making any external guidelines superfluous, be it law or religion. This belief in the superiority of personal intuition over traditional dogma repeats the argument Wilde advances in “The Soul of Man under Socialism.” In order to achieve this development, the fictional characters have to learn to become affiliative, realistic, and transparent; it is the implied author whose structural ploys provide them with the necessary opportunities to learn. The Voice of Jokanaan links the coming of the Saviour to a renewal of the senses: “The eyes of the blind shall see the day, and the ears of the deaf shall be opened” (CW 554). Based on this premise, the implied reader has to assume that the realism and the transparency which the further development of the plot will bring into the lives of the fictional characters are meant as a blessing to his creation, rather than a curse, as it clearly removes a cognitive handicap in people. Indeed, by claiming responsibility for the development of the plot, the implied author takes upon himself the role of the Saviour on a structural level. Modesty has never been Wilde’s strength, but then again, self-confidence can also imply an “abundance of well-being” (Skynner, *Life* 7) that one seeks to share with the wider world.

Yet another structural feature reflecting the implied author’s affiliative attitude is the conscious manipulation of the reader towards prejudice, only to correct his perceptions of the characters again in the further development of the plot. Many characters are introduced on the stage in their worst possible mood. The Page is constantly muttering about how evil everything is; Herod is presented as a ruthless usurper and sexual threat to his brother’s daughter; Salomé appears as an unworldly and spoiled brat once she is allowed to speak for herself (“You keep me

waiting” [CW 556]). Even so, we have been told that a truly affiliative person should give the benefit of the doubt to unfriendly people and not immediately shrink back after a hostile reaction. Hostility might be caused by shyness or by bad experiences in the past (Skynner, *Life* 6), and any person can loosen up when being treated in a friendly way over a longer period of time. The implied author does exactly that. No character enters the stage, misbehaves and then vanishes, to be remembered for this performance only. By consistently treating his characters with respect and consideration, the implied author can eventually bring out the best in most of them. The Page manages to show his considerate and affiliative side as he mourns the loss of his friend, the Young Syrian. Salomé is changing and maturing in the course of the play, and her final speech presents her in a state of mind closely approaching optimal functioning. Herod is given the chance to present himself as a conscientious and spiritual man who actually apologises for the inconveniences Salomé might have experienced as a consequence of his fascination with her.

Compared to the other characters, the idiosyncratic behaviour of Jokanaan comes across as rather unmotivated to most readers. I doubt that this was Wilde’s intention, but as an implied author he might indeed have been too subtle (and consequently rather unsuccessful) in pointing out the root of Jokanaan’s aggression to the reader. From what I can discern, Jokanaan’s misogyny and aggression is not so much explained by an acquired traditional religious dogmatism, but by a sense of inadequateness regarding his own attractiveness as a man. Physical beauty is a dominant theme in *Salomé*, and most characters, both male and female, are described as being very attractive. Even male characters admire physical beauty in other men, as Herod’s comment on the Syrian captain shows (CW 562). Only one person seems to be excluded from this boulevard of vanity, and that is the prophet Jokanaan – explicitly said to be “quite a young man” (CW 556) – who is imprisoned in an unhealthy cistern after having roamed the desert in rags. A closer look at the lexical style of his prophecies and accusations should make an alert reader suspicious with regard to the apparent voluntariness of the prophet’s ascetic lifestyle.

The prophet’s “outraged” account of Herodias’ sexual licentiousness, intended to condemn her acts, is given in the form of a rather aestheticized description of an activity that obviously must have been quite pleasurable for those involved: “Where is she who gave herself unto the Captains of Assyria, who have baldricks on their loins, and tiaras of divers colours on their heads? Where is she who hath given herself to the young men of Egypt, who are clothed in fine linen and purple, whose shields are of gold, whose helmets are of silver, whose bodies are mighty” (CW 557). Who else could object to this scenario so violently, and yet admire its participants so much, but someone who feels he has no chance at ever experiencing it himself? Indeed, if we look at the physical description of Jokanaan, seen through the eyes of the First

Soldier, we find that its sentence structure exactly parallels the above-mentioned passage: “He was clothed *in camel’s hair*, and round his loins he had a *leathern belt*. He was terrible to look upon” (CW 554; my emphasis). Later on, even Salomé herself concedes that the young man’s body is thin and wasted (CW 558).

With his slender figure and marked by his poverty, Jokanaan is obviously not the type of man who could ever appeal to a woman like Herodias. As a matter of fact, the Biblical passage which Jokanaan’s account echoes explicitly names jealousy as the reason for the speaker’s anger (Ezekiel 23:25). The notion of physical unattractiveness with its seemingly traumatic consequences for the individual is a recurring theme in several of Wilde’s stories, and its relevance for *Salomé* should therefore not be slighted. The most exaggerated scenario in connection with personal unattractiveness is found in “The Birthday of the Infanta,” where the misshaped Dwarf actually dies of a broken heart upon his discovery that the Infanta thinks him undesirable.

Even if Jokanaan does not appear acutely traumatised, his reaction to the queen at least points to serious envy. From “The Soul of Man under Socialism”, however, we know that Wilde felt little pity for the “sufferings” of the poor:

It is to be noted that Jesus never says that impoverished people are necessarily good, or wealthy people necessarily bad. That would not have been true. Wealthy people are, as a class, better than impoverished people, more moral, more intellectual, more well-behaved. There is only one class in the community that thinks more about money than the rich, and that is the poor. The poor can think of nothing else. (CW 1085)

Although the opinion expressed in this passage is not exactly a reflection of Wilde’s own affiliative attitude, we should accept it as a serious conviction underlying the character building in *Salomé*. Just as the prophet’s irritation with the tetrarch can be attributed to his own poverty, a feeling of physical inadequacy underlying his asceticism seems to be the best explanation for the young man’s idiosyncratic behaviour in the course of the play: his refusal to look at Salomé, his simultaneous awareness of her exact appearance, and his continued preoccupation with her even after his withdrawal from their encounter. Had deprivation been the prophet’s unalterable lot, his low level of health would not have been surprising. The implied author’s impatience with his character is reinforced by the fact that Jokanaan *chooses* to remain an outcast, despite being given the opportunity to change his condition. After all, why should the character of Salomé busy herself with reassuring Jokanaan about his beautiful looks and his beautiful voice, even at the end of the play, if not to show that his repression out of shame is altogether unnecessary?

Writing about *La Sainte Courtisane*, Epifanio San Juan comes to an identical conclusion about the hermit Honorius, namely that his “luxuriant phrases contradict his abstinence” (111). In

this later piece, the implied author strengthens the link between the description of the hermit's look and the physical appearance of Myrrhina's lovers. Here, the promiscuous heroine emphasises the fact that the hermit's looks and impoverished living conditions are by no means unalterable: "The dust of the desert lies on your hair and your feet are scratched with thorns and your body is scorched by the sun. Come with me, Honorius, and I will clothe you with a tunic of silk. I will smear your body with myrrh and pour spikenard on your hair. I will clothe you in hyacinth and put honey in your mouth" (CW 704). By the end of the story, the hermit actually becomes converted.

In *Salomé*, on the other hand, the character of Jokanaan is unable to change, and this fact points to the limitations of the implied author's affiliative attitude. Backing up his poverty and undesirability with religious dogmatism, thus turning his original lack into a virtue, Jokanaan comes across as the only character who does not as such "suffer" from his condition. The successfulness of the prophet's cognitive repression might explain why he is very difficult for any modern reader to sympathise with him. Indeed, it must be said that the implied author displays a significant lapse in the affiliative attitude in his treatment of the prophet's religious views. Jokanaan is seemingly portrayed as the play's hopeless case, unable to adapt to the changes which the plot necessarily has to bring about in order to bring relief to the fictional world. However, this inability on his part to adapt to the New Era is not a result of the character's own choices on a fictional level, it is structural. One could say that the prophet is predestined to fail.

If we are to believe that Jokanaan's utterances are put into his mouth by God, as Herod claims (CW 571), his very first announcement is striking indeed. At the very moment when he displays his greatest hope for the future of mankind, the prophet introduces himself to the reader as not being good enough: "After me shall come another mightier than I. I am not worthy so much as to unloose the latchet of his shoes" (CW 553). The later allusions to the feet of the Saviour on the mountains and Salomé's slaves taking of her shoes suggest that other characters *are* able to use Christ as a role model and imitate his actions. Jokanaan, however, is not, and it is the implied author who has it that way. Similarly, the prophet's cryptic prophecies – which are supposed to stem from God directly – seem to announce Jokanaan's own death as part of a larger scheme, even if the prophet himself does not comprehend the allusion: "Angel of the Lord God, what dost thou here with thy sword? Whom seekest thou in this foul palace? The day of him who shall die *in a robe of silver* has not yet come" (CW 558; my emphasis).

It seems that the implied author loses any interest in creating a round character as soon as personal concerns become enmeshed with religious dogma. Jokanaan, with his Old Testament views of asceticism and wrath, is presented as part of the old order which necessarily has to

vanish so that a new value system can take its place. Drawing on this kind of argumentation, the implied author basically excuses his intention of doing away with the life of the prophet in the course of the play. Functioning as a foil rather than an independent character, Jokanaan is not given any self-disclosing lines to speak, and the reader has a hard time getting to know him. Ironically, the fictional Salomé seems to function better than her own creator when she gives the prophet the benefit of the doubt: “Behind thine hands and thy curses thou didst hide thy face” (CW 574). On a structural level, we do not find a similarly understanding tone of voice, and even though we are only dealing with fiction, such a belief in the inalterability of certain religious attitudes can be taken a critical lapse in the implied author’s respect for other people’s right to be different. It seems that the character of Jokanaan has to be sacrificed by way of structural invention so that the others can be saved.

The Affiliative Cast in Salomé

It is one thing for an implied author to demonstrate that he himself perceives and appreciates the variety of experience the world has to offer. An altogether different question is if he possesses any hope that others are able to experience life in a similar way and thus, in a collective effort, might attempt to make the world a better place. After all, only a firm belief in mankind’s value and resourcefulness would constitute an incentive for the reader to try and seek out human contact himself in the real world. In order to communicate such hope, the implied author has to transfer the affiliative attitude from a structural level downwards into the fictional universe itself. It is in this respect that openness and optimism are often found missing in works of literature. To give an example, Mikhail Bakhtin demonstrates the intentional lack of structural optimism in a passage from Lev Tolstoy’s “Three Deaths”:

Three deaths are portrayed in the story – the deaths of a rich noblewoman, a coachman, and a tree. . . . And in Tolstoy’s story all three lives, and the levels defined by them, are *internally self-enclosed and do not know one another*. There is no more than a purely external pragmatic connection between them, necessary for the compositional and thematic unity of the story. . . . In this way three lives and three deaths come to be externally connected.

But an internal connection, *a connection between consciousnesses*, is not present here. The dying noblewoman knows nothing of the life and death of the coachman or the tree, they do not enter into her field of vision or her consciousness. And neither the noblewoman nor the tree enter the consciousness of the dying coachman. . . .

But all three personages, with their self-enclosed worlds, are united, juxtaposed and made meaningful to one another in the *author’s* unified field of vision and consciousness that encompasses them. (69-70; emphasis in original)

With this technique of structural connection combined with text-internal disconnectedness, the implied author in “Three Deaths” implicitly presents solipsism as the essential feature of the

human condition. Human beings, he proposes to his readers, are not able to see the similarities of their worlds and can therefore not connect emotionally. This kind of attitude towards human encounter is clearly pessimistic, and I mention Tolstoy's story as an example because Wilde's *Salomé* has been accused of conveying the same idea.

Rodney Shewan, among other critics, discerns indifference towards one another as the key characteristic of the play's cast (135). Since fictional characters behave in this or that way towards one another because the implied author makes them do so, Shewan's proposition constitutes an implicit claim that interpersonal indifference is representative of the world as Wilde sees it. To challenge this view, I will have a closer look at the way the implied author organises the interpersonal encounters that take place on a fictional level. The result is surprising and revealing: For a play that is supposed to deal with human relationships at their worst, the fictional action in *Salomé* contains a surprisingly high degree of initiative and openness to human encounter. Not only are people and fates connected in the mind of the implied author and reader, they actually meet within the story itself. As it turns out, the "gloomy" social world of *Salomé* might not be so hopelessly dysfunctional, after all.

This is, according to Bakhtin, how an extraordinary writer like Fyodor Dostoevsky would have written "Three Deaths":

First of all, Dostoevsky would have forced these three planes to be reflected in one another, he would have bound them together with dialogic relationships. He would have introduced the life and death of the coachmen and the tree into the field of vision and consciousness of the noblewoman, and the noblewoman's life into the field of vision and consciousness of the coachman. He would have forced his characters to see and know all those essential things that he himself – the author – sees and knows. (72)

With the structure of *Salomé*, Wilde achieves just the same effect. All information the reader acquires about any character's emotional situation comes either from a dialogic confrontation or thorough observation within the fictional setting. Human encounter is presented as the key to mutual understanding and self-development in Wilde's play, and it allows the fictional characters to become acquainted with all the essential things that the implied author communicates to the implied reader by means of structure.

In a drama, interpersonal contact is naturally presented primarily in the form of dialogue. Yet, the implied author in *Salomé* manages to convey the character's sincere interest in conversation, by presenting them as actively seeking interpersonal contact. From the very beginning, the play offers many examples of successful dialogue brought about by personal initiative. Especially the minor characters, who can be said to create a background mood for the main characters of the story, are presented as valuable human resources. The First Soldier initiates an informative dialogue with the Second Soldier; the Cappadocian begins a friendly

conversation with the First Soldier, which soon also includes the Second Soldier and the Nubian. All of these characters are well-informed and eager to share information when asked to do so. Approaching other people in order to seek information or advice is thus presented by the implied author as positive and rewarding. Furthermore, none of these dialogues are disjointed. On the contrary, each participant's contribution relates to the previous contribution, and the conversation partners display an interest in what others have to say. While the First Soldier presents the quarrelling Jews to the reader as "wild beasts howling" (CW 552), they are nothing but civilised in their manner of discussion when they actually appear on stage. The Jews voice their subjective opinions and hear each other out, only to disagree afterwards (CW 563). The main characters Salomé and Herod are equally interested in human encounter. The princess begins a conversation about Elias with the First Soldier, and she later initiates the contact with Jokanaan, from whom she does not withdraw despite his hostile reaction. It is interesting here that even the seemingly reclusive prophet exhibits eagerness for communication, once he has left the cistern: "Where is he whose cup of abominations is now full? . . . Bid him come forth, that he may hear the voice of him who had cried in the waste places and in the houses of kings" (CW 557). A little later, the tetrarch himself demonstrates his sociability in initiating conversations with his soldiers as well as the Jews.

In contrast, attempts at communication which do not really address or *include* an addressee are *not* rewarded within the fictional setting. The Young Syrian's half-monologue "How beautiful is the Princess Salomé tonight" (CW 552) is perceived as bothersome by the Page, who instead tries to change the subject and thus establish a conversation which includes them both. The Syrian's later attempts at conversation with Salomé fail due to his simultaneous attempts to manipulate her into leaving the terrace. Rather than addressing her genuine needs, he is only concerned with shielding her from his rival; as a consequence, suggestions like "Is it your pleasure that I bid them bring your litter, Princess? The night is fair in the garden" (CW 555) are ignored by Salomé. The stylistic result of this non-affiliative attitude towards communication is the occasional occurrence of "self-contained, almost Absurdist, *non sequiturs*" which Shewan wrongly perceives as characteristic of the play's dialogues in general (137).

The affiliative attitude displayed in *Salomé* also manifests itself in a general enjoyment and appreciation of human company, going beyond communicative situations. The word "friend" occurs several times in the play, and with good reason. Many members of the play's cast – those that care to "look" – appear as contact-seeking for its own sake. The Page recalls pleasant memories of the time he spent with the Syrian, who was "nearer to me than a brother" (CW 560). Yet, of all the characters, Herod displays the affiliative attitude to the most extraordinary degree.

Alan Bird points out that “[a]lthough *Salome* [sic] is a short play, the rôle of Herod is of marathon length” (73), certainly owing to the fact that the tetrarch is involved in the greatest number of interpersonal encounters. He acts as an attentive host to the guests at his court, criticising the inconsiderateness of other contemporary kings: “Wherefore is there blood here . . . ? And this body, what does this body here? Think you that I am the King of Egypt, who gives no feast to his guests but that he shows them a corpse” (CW 561; ellipsis in original). Furthermore, he treats his slave, the Young Syrian, as a “guest, as it were, and for that reason I made him my captain” (CW 562). The same respect is shown for the prophet Jokanaan.

In particular, the implied author does his best to present Herod’s romantic interest in Salomé as a manifestation of the tetrarch’s general affiliative attitude, rather than mere lust. Herod enters the stage not so much in pursuit of the princess, but rather because he seems to miss her company: “Where is Salomé? Where is the Princess? Why did she not return to the banquet as I commanded her? Ah! There she is” (CW 561). Indeed, it is the tetrarch’s infatuation which makes possible the reader’s encounter with this character in the first. After all, Herod is reported *never* to come to the terrace (CW 561). The reader’s evaluation of the tetrarch’s feelings for Salomé is crucial to his evaluation of the play’s overall ethos, and it therefore important that the implied author manages to communicate such nuances. Once he is back in Salomé’s company, Herod seems remarkably appeased. Of a lecherous man we might expect constant suggestive nagging for favours, but the tetrarch does not do that. Instead, he addresses the princess sporadically with discrete and polite requests, and he takes her no with more or less good grace (“What is it to me if she dance or not” [CW 567]). The reader is duly informed that Herod can get sex elsewhere if not anywhere, and among his slaves there might even be former queens. Yet, this is not what he wants from Salomé. Instead, the tetrarch explicitly wants to be “friends” with her (CW 571), and most importantly, he wants to *share* when he asks her to “drink a little wine *with* me,” “eat fruit *with* me,” and “sit *next to* me” (CW 562; my emphasis).

Strangely enough, it is Salomé herself who gives the reader the impression that Herod’s advances are not unacceptable as such. By the time she enters the stage, the reader has already been informed about the fact that the tetrarch married his brother’s wife, from which he can infer that Salomé is Herod’s niece. The implied author does not become any more explicit. The princess herself refers to the tetrarch’s “mole’s eyes under his shaking eyelids” (CW 555), which suggests to the reader that Herod might be quite old already. While her decision to remain a virgin might have been based on these arguments, Salomé does not dwell on these things at all. Instead, she refers to Herod as “the husband of my mother” (CW 555), focusing on his obvious lack of commitment to his wife. Apart from that, the princess only seems to mind the fact that the

tetrarch is socially beneath her. Salomé's contemplation of the moon is a suggestive allusion to her own and her mother's impeccable royal status: "Yes, she is a virgin. She has never defiled herself. She has never abandoned herself *to men, like the other goddesses*" (CW 555; my emphasis). However, if these are the only objections the princess herself can come up with, the reader can hardly take offence in Herod's advances.

From the moment she enters the stage, the character of Salomé is mostly presented in interpersonal constellations which somehow involve romantic attachment. It is therefore difficult to assess her affiliative attitude on a general level. To begin with, Salomé initiates a friendly conversation with the soldiers, trying to gather information about the prophet, but after that, every communicative situation she is involved in also involves infatuation on the part of one participant. An affiliative or non-affiliative attitude on her part can therefore only be attested within a romantic setting. Again, I take this restriction to be structural rather than based on the fictional character's choice; there is no strong indication that the implied author intends to make a particular point. On the contrary, Salomé's fascination with Jokanaan even seems to counteract her original inclination to withdraw from the society of others altogether, reflected in her flight from the banquet hall. Within the given limitations, then, Salomé's behaviour reflects a positive attitude towards social interaction in that she exhibits a desire for a personal encounter with Jokanaan. Her main interest in the prophet soon shifts from "speaking" to "looking" and finally touching and kissing, and what Donohue perceives as a sign of perversity ("Distance" 128) is actually a sign of health. While Salomé's request "Speak again, Jokanaan, and tell me what I must do" (CW 558) signals that she is still open to what the prophet has to say, the princess also admires the shape of his body and the tone of his voice. Rather than using Jokanaan as a *means* to derive information, the princess develops an affiliative curiosity for his whole person.

Even the apocalyptic character of Jokanaan starts out with a positive attitude towards life and other people. His prophecy of the arrival of the Saviour demonstrates a general hope for mankind, and he is also reported as having expressed gratitude towards the First Soldier for the food he receives. Curiously enough, Jokanaan does not shun human encounter completely. Although he is convinced that they will not alter their behaviour in any way, he nevertheless seeks contact with Herod and especially Herodias: "Though she will never repent, but will stick fast in her abominations; bid her come" (CW 557-58). Also at a later stage, while perceiving his personal contact with Salomé as disconcerting, he does not object to human encounter as such. In fact, he actively advocates people seeking out the Saviour: "Go seek Him. . . . When he cometh to thee (and *to all who call on Him He cometh*) bow thyself at His feet and ask of him the

remission of thy sins” (CW 560; my ellipsis and emphasis). The occurrence of an explicit ethical proposition deserves special attention here, as an instance where the morality communicated *in* the play conflates with the morality communicated through the play’s form.

What is one to make of Herodias’ behaviour in this respect? The image of the luxurious, sexually licentious woman has always fascinated Wilde, and it reoccurs in his poem “The Sphinx” as well as in *La Sainte Courtisane*. Jane Marcus argues convincingly for Wilde’s appreciation of strong women, owing to the influence of his rather liberal mother (99), while Melissa Knox points specifically to the parallels between the historical Lady Wilde and the character of Herodias (237-38). In *Salomé*, Herodias’ human encounters are primarily sexual encounters, but this does not make her any less open to meeting new lovers. She even displays a remarkable initiative in the matter, sending out her ambassadors for Chaldean soldiers, after having been inspired by wall paintings. Neither does she exhibit any prejudices concerning social status, and the wording “gave herself” (CW 557) reflects a directly generous and welcoming attitude towards her lovers. In *La Sainte Courtisane*, the implied author makes it even more explicit that sexual devotion to social inferiors is an aspect of the heroine’s affiliative attitude: “I made the Prince my slave, and his slave who was a Tyrian I made my Lord for the space of a moon” (CW 704). In a drama, where there is no objective narrative voice, one possibility for an implied author is to pass judgment on his characters’ behaviour is to expose them to criticism within the fictional setting. As a matter of fact, Herodias’ sexual licentiousness is accepted (if only condoned) by all the cast except the character of Jokanaan, whose own credibility in moral matters is soon weakened in turn. The queen’s attitude towards her lovers can therefore be regarded as affiliative, too. If she nevertheless comes across as dysfunctional to the reader, her deficits must be sought elsewhere.

The “connection between consciousnesses” which Bakhtin considers so characteristic of Dostoevsky’s fiction is also strongly visible in Wilde’s *Salomé*. Structurally, it is primarily the symbolism of the language which unites the individual characters’ identical state of mind in the reader’s consciousness. For example, several characters appear “troubled” in the course of the play. The adjective is used in connection with Salomé, Herod, and Jokanaan. Yet, had the implied author intended to demonstrate solipsism as the human condition, the word would have fallen in a soliloquy or an aside, hidden from the rest of the cast, thus creating tragic irony shared only by a knowing author and a knowing reader. In *Salomé*, this is not the case. Instead of restricting the visibility of these parallels to the discourse level between author and reader, the implied author lets his fictional characters partake in the insight. Like Dostoevsky’s heroes, they enter each other’s consciousness and field of vision.

The reader learns that Salomé looks troubled because the Young Syrian is so attentive to her. Later on, Jokanaan's eyes are likened to "black lakes troubled by fantastic moons" (CW 558) by Salomé. Finally, Herod reveals his sorrow to Salomé when he confesses that he is troubled by her beauty (CW 571). Since she is involved in all three situations, Salomé becomes acquainted with Jokanaan's trouble and Herod's trouble as well as her own. This example shows how easily solipsism can be counteracted in a social network. Some characters in Wilde's universe are even capable of reconstructing in their own consciousness another person's subjective experience of the world, thus demonstrating that they are able to look at their own actions from a different angle. Salomé's articulated stream of consciousness gives an accurate reflection of the subjective situation of the Young Syrian (CW 557). The tetrarch, even though his inferences are not always as accurate, is able to judge his own behaviour from Salomé's point of view (CW 571). Again, this demonstrates the implied author's awareness that other human beings are not instruments for the satisfaction of personal needs, but independent entities with own needs and desires.

Since most of the play's characters are acutely aware of other people's problems, this gives them the opportunity to be extraordinarily considerate towards one another. It is an important aspect of the play's meaning that both minor and major characters display this positive attitude as long as they do not find themselves under pressure. The Young Syrian, due to his infatuation, pays close attention to Salomé and thus becomes aware that she looks troubled. While watching the banquet, the soldiers are aware of the tetrarch's "sombre look" and attempt to figure out the reason for his concern (CW 553). Later on, Herod himself is worried about Salomé's well-being: "I am not ill. It is your daughter who is sick. She has the mien of a sick person. Never have I seen her so pale" (CW 562). Although Herodias may come across as rather inconsiderate throughout much of the play ("What is it to you if she be pale or not [CW 566]), this lack of caring is not caused by a lack of interest in other people. She is well aware that her husband usually is unhappy (CW 567-68), and the depression of her Page does not pass her by (CW 565). The alleged indifference which Rodney Shewan refers to can at best be seen as a partial inability on the part of the characters to profit fully from the possibilities which the play's setting undoubtedly offers in connection with human encounter.

The way the various characters in *Salomé* are presented, the implied author suggests that an affiliative attitude is the basic state of mind of an unimpeded human being. This echoes Wilde's ideas on the true personality of man: "It knows that people are good when they are let alone" (CW 1100). Indeed, the entire cast in Wilde's play is extremely well-mannered when it comes to respecting another person's right to choose one's company, a phenomenon which I take to be rare in works of fiction. It is interesting to see that no initiative regarding human contact is

effectively blocked on a fictional level. The idea of interpersonal encounter as something positive – especially when romantic feelings are involved – seems to be ingrained in every character’s subconscious, so that all personal attempts at hindering interpersonal contact remain half-hearted. Although there are many allusions to hiding oneself or another person from contact with others, these attempts are feeble and ineffective. In particular, no force is used to prevent two people from meeting, or to hinder an individual from withdrawing from uncomfortable company. Maybe it can even be said that the implied author sees human encounter as so vital that he actually condones Jokanaan’s being forced *into* a meeting with Salomé (although he is later allowed to withdraw again).

The Page cannot prevent his friend from being infatuated with the princess, even if the consequences are hard for him to bear. In hindsight, he regrets having exposed the Syrian to a rival (“If I had hidden him in a cavern she would not have seen him” [CW 560]), but even so, he did not act on this wish when it might have mattered. Likewise, Herod’s order – issued without further explanation – to prevent anyone from talking to the prophet is effectively ignored by his soldiers. Indeed, the First Soldier, while reluctant to compromise his own integrity, encourages Salomé to pursue her endeavour further by referring her to the more susceptible Young Syrian: “Princess, our lives belong to you, but we cannot do what you have asked of us. And indeed, it is not of us that you should ask this thing” (CW 556). When Salomé becomes infatuated with Jokanaan instead of himself, the Young Syrian admits defeat by committing suicide, rather than interfering with her right to choose her company. His corpse, which falls between Salomé and the prophet, does not constitute anything more than a symbolic barrier or admonition to leave off. Yet even this symbolic attempt at hindering a personal encounter by making her conscientious is only tentative, and therefore unsuccessful in attracting Salomé’s attention. Neither does Herodias apply anything more than verbal criticism to put a stop to her husband’s infatuation with her own daughter. The tetrarch does not even go that far. Although he is aware of the Syrian’s infatuation with Salomé, he does not intervene in the matter, but instead keeps his disapproval to himself until after the Syrian’s death (CW 562).

“Love Only Should One Consider” – Love or Limerence?

Of course, Wilde’s *Salomé* is first and foremost a play about love. Love – on the basis of the affiliative attitude – is the remedy which the implied author recommends to his fictional characters. The comfort which in earlier times was sought in gods, visible or invisible, is in reality to be found in other human beings, who are alive, touchable, and on an equal footing with the “believer.” Yet, the question that needs to be answered is what form this love should take in

the life of a person, and which form of love best conveys a person's affiliative attitude to human encounter. Should there be one great love that will last forever, to the exclusion of all other options, or should one's love life pay tribute to the variety the world has to offer?

The American psychologist Dorothy Tennov makes a distinction between two forms of love which is most helpful for an understanding of Wilde's play. The traditional concept of romantic love is called "limerence" by Tennov:

To be in the state of limerence is to feel what is usually termed "being in love." It appears that love and sex can coexist without limerence, in fact that any of the three may exist without the others. . . . The person who is not limerent toward you may feel great and concern for you, even tenderness, and possibly sexual desire as well. A relationship that includes no limerence may be a far more important one in your life, when all is said and done, than any relationship in which you experienced the strivings of limerent passion. Limerence is not in any way pre-eminent among types of human attractions or interactions; but when limerent is in full force, it eclipses other relationships. (16)

The main characteristic of limerent lovers is thus that they assign an exaggerated significance to the role of one person in their lives, and that they experience cognitive preoccupation with their "limerent object" (23 passim). People who are "nonlimerent" (107 passim), on the other hand, feel that their (potential) partners' behaviour, or even their existence, only partly contributes to their own emotional well-being. Since nonlimerents consider intimate love relationships as simply "add[ing] to life's pleasures" (108), this manifestation of love seems to be equivalent to Skynner's concept of "healthy love" (*Life* 10-11) minus the aspect of sexual commitment. Interestingly, nonlimerence keeps cropping up in Oscar Wilde's fiction, as the love promoted by the likes of Lord Henry, Herodias, Myrrhina, and finally Lord Illingworth.

In *Salomé*, we encounter the prototype of the nonlimerent lover in the character of Herodias. The queen is enjoying numerous affairs with desirable men without becoming emotionally committed. Since she is rich and attractive, and since her royal title belongs to her family, her status and identity is secure in peaceful times. As a consequence, she does not have to make her life dependent on the feedback of her men; her love affairs are for the sake of pleasure only, and here she "gives herself" freely. As long as her living conditions remain stable, Herodias has every reason to be content with her choice of lifestyle. On the other hand, just like most of Wilde's limerent characters, the queen has been accused by critics as being inconsiderate, and it is exactly this accusation which deserves further examination. Admittedly, her first husband lost her throne and finally his life as a consequence of her shifting partners; in addition, she does not comprehend or try to console any of the play's unhappy characters, including her own daughter. In this respect, the queen's nonlimerence opens for an accusation that her love is uncaring and thus non-affiliative. Nevertheless, the implied author seems reluctant to pass judgment on her.

Instead, he implicitly and explicitly discusses to which extent the “neglected” characters can demand such “commitment” of a non-limerent person. The queen’s first husband had as little a claim to the throne as his brother. His identity and lifestyle as a king are solely bound to Herodias’ willingness to be his wife, and thus completely dependent on their sex life. As soon as he fails to attract her sexually, his whole life falls apart, and it is difficult to see how his unlucky fate should be another person’s fault. I must emphasize that the implied author does not link Herodias to the death of her first husband, and his execution is only discussed in connection to his royal status: “Yet it is a terrible thing to strangle a king” (CW 554). Eventually, the queen’s apparent lack of consideration seems to be restricted to cases of limerent suffering, which she does not care to encourage.

For Tennov, the most important precondition to the development of full-blown limerence is uncertainty about possible reciprocity, or another form of complication: “Something must happen to break a totally positive interaction. Not that positive reactions are without highly redeeming features in themselves; it is only that they stop the progression to full or maximum limerence” (26). Totally positive interaction would mean affiliative nonlimerence, and it prevents the development of the usual feeling of “bliss.” Tennov finds the same mechanisms at work in fiction: “Story writers use a multitude of devices to keep their characters from experiencing premature reciprocity, at which point the story would end and the lovers go off into mutual bliss that might be ecstatic for the participants, but would not hold the interest of the reader for very long” (161). What Tennov is basically saying is that the portrayal of love in fiction can be taken as an indication of the implied author’s personal preferences. Ironically, John Cleese holds just the same view, although he is far less enthusiastic:

[A]ll I seem to observe now is how much unhappiness the idealisation of dependence brings. Just take the Great Love Stories – Romeo and Juliet, La Traviata, Anna Karenina, Carmen, Antony and Cleopatra, Aida, Doctor Zhivago, Tristan and Isolde, Brief Encounter. Mention them to people and a dreamy radiance passes across their face and they say: ‘Oh, they’re wonderful aren’t they, so romantic.’ Well, they’re not wonderful. There’s not ten minutes of good, everyday happiness and fun in any of them. The lovers usually get one dollop of over-the-top ecstasy and apart from that it’s wall-to-wall suffering. . . . They’re convinced that they can only find happiness with one other person, whom they deliberately choose on grounds of unavailability. (Skynner, *Life* 15-16; my ellipsis)

Cleese’s comment is highly relevant for an understanding of Wilde’s *Salomé*. After all, Tennov makes explicit reference to the writer (227) as well as his fictional character Salomé (157) in connection with limerence. As I see it, however, the “joy” of limerence is structurally undermined in Wilde’s play, to demonstrate its inferiority to nonlimerence.

In real life, it is often the limerent lover himself who feels the need to create uncertainty. As a supporter of blissful infatuation, Tennov insists: “When you are limerent, no matter how intensely you desire reciprocation you cannot simply ask for it. You cannot simply inquire whether or not it exists. To ask is to risk premature self-disclosure” (67). If we look at *Salomé* with this idea in mind, we will be surprised to find that the Young Syrian and the Page are the only characters who *choose* to be limerent, and who prefer limerent ambiguity and uncertainty to directness. The Syrian seems undecided what he could possibly want from princess if he really got her, and the Page seems too scared of a negative response to risk self-disclosure. Judging from the implied author’s treatment of these two characters, it does not seem as if he takes voluntary limerent suffering too seriously. The Syrian’s ends his life by committing suicide, his body falls dramatically between the desired princess and the Syrian’s rival – and is plainly ignored by Salomé. Later, Herod and Tigellius conclude that it is “ridiculous to kill oneself” and that the Emperor has already written a satire against the Stoics (CW 561), while the Page is quite unceremoniously struck by Herodias with a fan (CW 565). This humour seems indeed to be intentional, like Mario Praz has suggested (16), and it serves to estrange the reader from any fascination with noble limerent suffering. Herod and especially Salomé, on the other hand, do not volunteer to be limerent, and neither of them feels the need to procrastinate. Neither does the author present their objects of desire as deliberately chosen “on grounds of unavailability.” Herod cannot really approach his wife’s daughter because of a social taboo and still he does, convinced that she will return his affection. Salomé herself sees no reason whatsoever why the young prophet should object to a nonlimerent encounter, and she asks him right away. This phenomenon is very unusual compared to the traditional idealisation of infatuation, and it gives a good indication as to what is considered healthy and comfortable in Wilde’s fictional universe. In *Salomé*, even the limerent lovers would apparently be nonlimerent if they could.

The next aspect of romantic love which is challenged in Wilde’s play is the illusion of unselfishness. The queen is criticised for not caring about her men much, but are limerent lovers any better? The Syrian’s awareness of Salomé’s paleness makes him consider her even more attractive as an object of contemplation. In fact, he attempts to perpetuate the crisis which makes her behave like a “narcissus trembling in the wind” (CW 555), by trying to send her back into the banqueting hall she has just fled. As the example of the Syrian shows, limerence makes the lover unmindful, rather than mindful of the beloved’s independent needs. Ironically, while the shared experience of being unhappily in love makes the limerent characters aware of each others sufferings, it does not allow them to really help each other. Herod’s attempts at curing Salomé’s malaise are equally unsuccessful, in that he seeks to cure his own at the same time (CW 562).

Eventually, the Wildean state of limerence is incompatible with the affiliative attitude, as it does not spring from an “abundance of well-being.” All that Wilde’s limerent characters manage to do with their empathy is watch each other suffer. Seen from this perspective, the queen’s reaction to her Page is as sincere an offer for help as the other characters’ sympathetic consideration, especially since her contribution includes a precise diagnosis: “You have a dreamer’s look; you must not dream. It is only sick people who dream. [*She strikes the Page with her fan*]” (CW 565). Since the implied author gives the character of Herodias enough speaking time to make several such claims, the reader should have reason enough to take her position seriously with respect to the play’s promotion of the affiliative attitude. As it appears, the play presents an individual’s self-imposed suffering and isolation as the main obstacle to the effectiveness of other people’s helpfulness. Tennov’s study on romantic love confirms Wilde’s intuition that the isolation which limerent persons perceive is more or less self-imposed (87).

Nevertheless, Wilde must have seen something good in the phenomenon of limerence, or he would not have advocated it so much in his works. If the lifestyle of Herodias does not qualify as exceptionally healthy in the eyes of the implied author, it must be due to the fact that her attitude is dependent on favourable living conditions. While Skynner himself emphasizes that “a high level of mental health can only be of interest to people once they’re physically safe, have enough to eat, a roof over their heads, and a degree of comfort” (*Life* 5), Wilde dreams of a form of love which is not susceptible to material crisis. Whether he manages to portray this love as a convincing alternative is another matter. As a matter of fact, one important characteristic of limerent passion is a desire for self-improvement which is alien to a nonlimerent lover (123). Since they attach so much value to their object of desire, limerent lovers are constantly dissatisfied with their own situation and have therefore ample opportunity to improve themselves. This is an opportunity which is denied to the nonlimerent Herodias. Since her social status and her desirability as a woman is never questioned in the course of the play, she will always have enough lovers at her disposal, so she perceives no need for self-improvement.

The character of Salomé has the function of demonstrating how limerent love can be transformed into nonlimerent love. Her self-esteem based on her royal status is undermined by Jokanaan, which forces her to recast her identity, basing her self-worth on a healthy personality rather than status. Since the prophet is thoroughly unimpressed by Salomé’s title of a princess, she experiences an identity crisis which several times has the power to destroy her limerent passion. The social respectability as a virginal princess, which Jokanaan does not attribute to her in the first place, Salomé finally helps destroying by behaving in an “altogether monstrous” way (CW 574) in connection with his execution. After this, she is faced with the destructive and self-

destructive results of her limerence, as well as the invariable end of all hope for future happiness with Jokanaan. It is in reaction to his unresponsiveness that the princess acquires the belief in her worth as a human being, simply based on her personality: “If thou hadst seen me thou wouldst have loved me” (*CW 574*). She does no longer need his confirmation of reciprocity in order to feel valuable. Her final comment on the affair is: “They say that love hath a bitter taste. . . . But what of that? What of that? I have kissed thy mouth, Jokanaan” (*CW 575*; ellipsis in original). By the end of the play, Salomé is presented in an exceptionally healthy state of nonlimerence.

However, there is a disconcerting lapse in her otherwise healthy monologue: “Ah, Jokanaan, Jokanaan, thou wert the only man that I have loved. All other men are hateful to me” (*CW 574*). It is one thing to remain sensually indifferent to other men around her, but to perceive them as directly hateful is a severe violation of the affiliative attitude. Salomé’s attitude towards love still seems exclusive. For one, the comment suggests that Salomé is little appreciative of the role other men have played in her development as a woman. This perception, however, is unrealistic and ungrateful given the fact that it was Herod’s attention which made the Princess conscious of her sensual powers in the first place. Moreover, Salomé seems to be not simply uninterested, but directly unwilling to feel an undemanding, nonlimerent love for any other man but Jokanaan in her future life. Such an opinion reveals a pessimistic attitude towards other people’s worth as loveable human beings. Portrayed in this fashion, the implied author cannot make Salomé’s love appear as a functional alternative to the queen’s nonlimerence.

Eventually, it is the promiscuous Herodias who survives the play, and this “structural” survival is significant. It was the other characters’ limerent needs which threatened the stability of the queen’s nonlimerent universe, but instead these limerent characters defeated each other. That she is rich and attractive is not the queen’s fault, so we cannot expect the implied author to punish her for her privileged living conditions. When all is said and done, the queen keeps the kingdom going, and she makes a good wife for her insecure husband, who – maybe despite himself – values her highly: “Of a truth, dear and noble Herodias, you are my wife” (*CW 566*). With her last words to the reader, the queen furthermore demonstrates a far more positive outlook than any of the other characters in Wilde’s play: “I approve of what my daughter has done. And I will stay here now” (*CW 574*).

Chapter 2: You Can't Love What You Don't Know – The Importance of Realistic Perceptions

As the empirical research has attested, an unconditionally positive approach to life is unrewarding if it is not backed up with accurate perceptions of how the world really is. The greatest challenge to every individual is to integrate pleasant and unpleasant aspects of life and human nature into one homogenous picture of reality, and still feel attracted to it. Dostoevsky makes a good point when he has one of his characters say: “It’s impossible to love something you don’t know” (38). In the same way, realistic perceptions of one’s own person are essential for self-acceptance. Since self-confidence in turn makes a person less dependent on external feedback, realistic perceptions are beneficial for social interaction in general.

Of course, a world which is both good and bad makes it all the more challenging to act adequately in every situation. It is a lot simpler to apply one general policy of conduct. In the majority of people, caution proves to be the most adaptive solution (Skynner, *Life* 8). However, a slightly hostile attitude to human encounter and novelty in general severely reduces a person’s chances at becoming acquainted with the unknown. Unless one attempts to hide away from the world (which some of the characters in *Salomé* indeed try), one will inevitably have to face up to with things that do not conform to one’s stereotypes. Yet, being constantly confronted with things one does not understand keeps a person under constant stress, and it is such unpredictability which makes love impossible. There is no room for emotional generosity where an “abundance of well-being” cannot be felt. In addition, even positive aspects about life and other people have to be disregarded or devalued to make a general policy of avoidance appear adaptive. Thus, pessimistic people deprive themselves of positive impressions as much as they avoid negative ones. They make the world appear uglier than it really is.

In many of his works, Wilde tries to promote realistic perceptions in the reader, not only to find acceptance for his own views, but for the reader’s sake, to make life and other people appear more predictable and comprehensible. This will in turn make the affiliative attitude appear more adaptive as a general policy. Thus his philosophy of life anticipates the conclusion Vaillant arrives at (talking here specifically about defence mechanisms): “Once we start to appreciate the existence of defenses, we see them used by friends, neighbors, and relatives. . . . Rather, by understanding defenses, we can often master what disturbs us about other people. When we understand the whys of irrational behavior, we become less judgmental . . .” (*Wisdom* 24). Wilde’s fictional universes feature more than a few characters who have arrived at a realistic acceptance of the human condition without despairing. Lord Henry postulates: “I never approve,

or disapprove, of anything now. It is an absurd attitude to take towards life. We are not sent into the world to air our moral prejudices” (CW 66). As a consequence of this philosophy, he and the world “are on excellent terms” (CW 136).

In the Preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Wilde writes: “Those who find ugly meanings in beautiful things are corrupt without being charming. This is a fault. Those who find beautiful meanings in beautiful things are the cultivated. For these there is hope” (CW 17). Especially a dysfunctional social reality of the kind we find in *Salomé* is in sore need of realism in the eye of the beholder before it can be beautiful. Roy F. Baumeister makes an important observation about the nature of evil, which is highly relevant for Wilde’s promotion of realistic perceptions: “If victimization is the essence of evil, then the question of evil is a victim’s question” (1). In many cases, a victim’s feeling of being wronged is linked to an exaggerated self-understanding (26), which means that a reassessment of one’s own position, rights and needs in the world should make the notion of evil disappear. Wilde deals with this problem in many of his works, but in *Salomé* he does so most explicitly. In addition, as Baumeister notes, evil is hardly ever analysed from a perpetrator’s point of view, thus obscuring the mechanisms of cause and effect to the victim or the observer. Likewise, we should have reason to expect that a look at the causes of evil from the perpetrator’s point of view will destroy the myth of unmotivated malice. More often than not, the roles of aggressor and victim turn out to be reversible, again emphasizing the need for an awareness of one’s own contribution to interpersonal conflicts (see Skynner, *Life* 298-99). In *Salomé*, the implied author is acutely aware of the mechanisms leading to actions that can be perceived as evil. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the play’s structural ethos presents the affiliative attitude as the basic state of mind of an unimpeded human being, and this opinion pertains to the reader as much as to the fictional cast. The implied author therefore takes it upon himself to explain every controversial situation from several subjective angles. As long as a character or situation is properly explained, a reader will have no reason for displeasure or discomfort. Realistic perceptions are thus indeed essential for an honestly positive attitude to life and other people. While it is impossible to love something one does not know, it proves equally difficult to hate something one *does* know.

The Realistic Author

Wilde’s aspiration for a realistic correction of perception shows already in his choice of subject. His indebtedness to other works has been noted by most critics, but his motivation behind repeating other writers’ ideas has hardly been made subject of enquiry (Donohue, “Distance” 124-25). I see *Salomé* as a piece of constructive criticism offered by a healthy realist in reaction

to what he must perceive to be a rather one-sided representation of life's ethical reality. With the aspect of realism in mind, we can easily see how strongly *Salomé's* literary precedents almost called for constructive criticism. The Bible as well as Ernest Renan give a reasonably one-dimensional portrait of Herod Antipas, blaming his weak authority on a weakness of character, and punishing him with death for attempting to become a god himself (Acts 12:21-23). Wilde, on the other hand, apparently unconvinced that any person can possess such a simple character, sees enough incentive in a line like "And the king was exceedingly sorry" (Mark 6:26) to feel compelled to create a rounder portrait of the tetrarch, and thus "re-write history." This correction of history does not imply replacing an unrealistically negative image with an unrealistically positive one; instead, the implied author tries to create a balance of character which a reader can accept as probable and thus likable.

Elliot Gilbert takes the lack of interiority as the main deficiency in earlier accounts of the *Salomé* legend. Characters are presented as "admonitory figures meant to be seen from the outside; to the subjective observer they represent the alien . . . other, and 'emptied of all tragic content,' they evoke terror but never pity" (144). Wilde, on the other hand, allows his characters to speak for themselves, by which he creates "a subjectivity and an interiority which is signally absent from the sources and which surely helps to explain the universal appeal of his version" (142). Herod Antipas reveals himself in his speeches as a generous, religious, and conscientious man, while at the same time displaying all the weaknesses he has hitherto been accused of. The character of *Salomé* is granted a similarly balanced evaluation, compared to the negative description of the dancing princess in Huysmans' novel *À Rebours*, and the damsel-like portrait of the daughter of Herodias in the Gospels. Most importantly, such a realistic balance is necessary to allow the reader to relate emotionally to the characters, and thus become open to the play's ethos in the first place. Gilbert notes on the "empathic dimension" of Wilde's play: "Without neglecting terror, he draws the subjective observer into the corresponding subjectivity of the characters, most notably of *Salomé* [sic]; thus events which in the sources of the story are shocking or absurd are rendered disturbingly familiar" (144). The seeming absurdity of human behaviour or events observed in many historical accounts is thus explained by Wilde as a consequence of the fact that half the evidence has been withheld from the observer by a biased chronicler. Already in "The Critic as Artist" he noted that "it is always Judas who writes the biography" (CW 1010).

Another important source of inspiration for *Salomé* is undoubtedly Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, and even the master of stagecraft exhibits flaws which do not escape Wilde's critical eye. Both plays deal with an adultery leading to the murder of a king, but in the fictional universe of

Salomé, people take life a lot easier. Wilde's first correction of "reality" is concerned with the idea that marital infidelity obviously is a symptom not only of moral decrepitude, but apparently also of cognitive impairment. In *Hamlet*, Gertrude demonstrates her moral decline by exchanging her honourable husband for his physically weaker and less attractive brother (3.4). Since her example is used to explain and defend a moral absolute on the subject of adultery, it is only just that the likelihood of such a scenario should be put to the test. Indeed, once the circumstances leading to marital infidelity are portrayed more true to life, it becomes increasingly difficult to take any general ethical position in the matter. In *Salomé*, the character of Herodias appears as a pragmatic counter-figure to Gertrude. Her infidelity is motivated by good rather than bad taste, since Herod is reportedly manlier than his brother ("Of a truth, I was stronger" [CW 566]). Neither does Wilde's queen feel guilt about any of her extra-marital encounters, unlike Shakespeare's Gertrude. The implied author in *Salomé* has no intention of refuting the accusation that the adulterous queen shows a lack of commitment to her husband, but he does not suggest that such lack of commitment is morally wrong on principle either. As a consequence, the development of the plot does not condemn the royal couple to death as a structural punishment for their actions, a fact which Donald Lawler has drawn particular attention to (255).

The link between adultery and unscrupulousness is also destabilised in Wilde's version of the story. In order to become king and the new husband of his brother's wife, Herod is not forced to go so far as to kill his brother in a surprise attack by pouring poison into his ear. The tetrarch is content with less violent means to secure his position: he keeps his brother imprisoned in a cistern for twelve years, a prison which ironically enough does not even prove detrimental to the captive's health. Such details in Wilde's play reflect the implied author's general faith in people's ability to cope with adverse life situations, and it counteracts tendencies towards an excessive focus on victimisation in the reader. While portraying Herod's action as clumsy, the implied author in *Salomé* certainly does not attempt to present the tetrarch as directly malicious. In like manner, the sense of loss which characterises the mood in Shakespeare's play following the death of the first king cannot be felt with equal force at Herod's court. According to the words of the First Soldier, the removal of one regent has not caused any political destabilisation, but is rather seen as a usual aspect of politics: "Kings have but one neck, like other folk" (CW 554). If anyone should have a reason to mourn the loss of the first king, it should be his daughter. Yet, *Salomé* has obviously an easier time coping with loss than Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. The trauma which Jane Marcus diagnoses in the princess (100) is virtually contradicted by text-internal evidence. Nowhere in the play does *Salomé* make any reference to her father; he is totally absent from her

mind. Even in her observation of Herod's explicit attention she refers to him as "the husband of my mother" (CW 555) rather than the brother of her father.

In his endeavour to promote realistic perceptions, Wilde is equally opposed to idealistic accounts. In *Salomé*, the implied author cannot refrain from commenting on things that seem too good to be true. In his description of Jokanaan, the First Soldier echoes the Gospels of Mark and Matthew: "From the desert, where he fed on locusts and wild honey. He was clothed in camel's hair, and round his loins he had a leathern belt" (CW 554). So far the passage is identical in style and content with the information given about John the Baptist in the Bible. Yet, Wilde's account does not end here. Instead, he adds an innocent-looking little comment: "He was very terrible to look upon" (CW 554). This sentence is *not* in the Gospels; instead, the First Soldier's comment is the common sense judgment of someone who does not object to comfort and who is not exactly a fervent supporter of Christian self-renunciation. By giving house-room to such critical voices, *Salomé* undermines the claim of the church to decide what the good life is supposed to consist in. In Wilde's play, the religiously correct life style as promoted in the Bible is a mere matter of taste, equal but not superior to any of the other lifestyles practiced on a fictional level.

The Same Stuff

Skygger makes an interesting remark with respect to our ideal of personality: "I think human nature's pretty much the same everywhere, in the sense that all human beings are made up of the same range of feelings, just as our bodies are composed of the same range of chemicals. We've all got affection, jealousy, courage, sadness, determination, joy, cowardice, kindness, cruelty, sexiness, shyness, and so on and so on" (*Families* 37-38). Ironically, then, what gives different people their individual personalities is really a sign of poor health. As it happens, most if not all people screen off and disown some of these aspects, or different combinations of emotions, simply because they are not perceived as desirable or acceptable (*Families* 22).

The idea is not new to readers of Oscar Wilde, who lets the figure of Vivian make the following remark in "The Decay of Lying" (1889):

In point of fact what is interesting about people in good society . . . is the mask that each of them wears, not the reality that lies behind the mask. It is a humiliating confession, but we are all of us made of the same stuff. In Falstaff, there is something of Hamlet, in Hamlet, there is not a little of Falstaff. . . . Where we differ from each other is purely in accidentals: in dress, manner, tone of voice, religious opinions, personal appearance, tricks of habit and the like. The more one analyses people, the more all reasons for analysis disappear. Sooner or later one comes to that dreadful thing called human nature. (CW 975)

Although Wilde is usually known as a promoter of distinction as a means to express an individual personality, he seems to have undergone a change of heart between the years of 1889 and 1891, when *Salomé* was written. In *Salomé*, the “same stuff” – human nature – is no longer presented as dreadful. For once, it is the voluntarily chosen mask which prevents the individual from realising his true personality, as it separates him from the larger human community. The structure of *Salomé* works almost brutally towards a demolition of any “individualising” distortion of reality, and the implied author’s obvious lack of patience with his characters in this matter must be taken as a sign that the issue had become almost pressing for Wilde.

As San Juan notes, the implied author in *Salomé* positions his creation in a fictional world devoid of any certainties, a situation which therefore no longer supports any strict adherence to stereotypical assumptions that limit the scope of acceptable reality (124). Not even the moon can be relied on as a reassuring, because fixed, reference point in Wilde’s play. Even a symbol of whiteness has “fits” of red, without ceasing to be the good old moon. *Salomé*’s many departures from the Biblical tradition are noteworthy in their own right, as this structural feature of the play undermines the characters’ explicit reference to their traditional position and authority. Donohue draws attention to the “notable instance of distancing” underlying the naming of the prophet (“Distance” 126), a fact which I take to be the very essence of Wilde’s version. Jokanaan is *not* John the Baptist, as little as Herod Antipas is any one of the Biblical Herods. The deposed and executed brother of the play’s Herod is *not* called Philip, in fact he has no name at all. The implied author’s main aim in this digression is to point out to the reader that the characters in *Salomé* cannot excuse their behaviour with reference to, or base their identity on, the established roles and status they have according to Biblical tradition. Neither can they be judged by the reader on the basis of prefabricated prejudices formed about their Biblical counterparts.

Instead, Wilde’s play offers a critical evaluation of the personality traits we usually associate with certain roles or concepts. What distinguishes a king from other people, or a princess? What distinguishes a prophet from an ordinary person? What defines a virgin, or a whore, or a robber? What distinguishes a woman from a little princess? Since the fictional characters as well as the critics make excessive use of such terms, one should expect them to have a rough idea about which qualities define an identity. Is a king a king because he does *not* possess certain personality traits like dishonesty and cowardice (CW 569), or do others not qualify for this position because they *lack* certain qualities? If this is so, how come that social roles are so fleeting at Herod’s court? Robbers become kings, kings become captives, queens and princes become slaves, slaves become captains, queens become the mistresses of knights, slaves become the mistresses of kings, etc. If any social role is based on inherent qualities in a person, this would

imply that one can either be one thing or another. Do the characters in *Salomé* then undergo a rapid change in personality along with their change of position? Obviously they do not, and the reason for this is the undeniable existence of the “same stuff.” It is their shared emotions and traits which allow the members of the cast to understand and interact with each other, play all kinds of roles, as well as adapt to changes in their respective life situations. Realistic self-acceptance is especially necessary in times of change, and to highlight the importance and inherent goodness of the “same stuff” is the most important aim of Wilde’s play. According to Skynner, a healthy person who denies none of the aspects of his nature can also utilise the full spectrum of his personality (*Life* 29). After all, “[n]o human feeling needs to be a cause of shame” (*Life* 26). In *Salomé*, then, the voluntary adherence to any particular ideal or role always implies a denial of certain character traits which are a functional part of human nature, thus reducing a person’s capacity for self-expression rather than enriching it.

Skynner is particularly explicit about the importance of seemingly “bad” emotions like anger, envy, and cruelty for a person’s ability to assert himself or stand up for himself in everyday life (*Families* 35-37). It is therefore vital that these emotions are seen as socially acceptable, so that the individual can learn how to handle them constructively. Otherwise, an emotion which is denied and repressed because it is perceived as uncomfortable will either not be available to a person when it is needed or it will manifest itself in an uncontrolled and therefore destructive outbreak (*Families* 35-37). In *Salomé*, the character of Herod exemplifies the consequences of such denial. Herod’s regular violent outbursts coincide with a general lack of healthy assertiveness. The timidity with which the tetrarch handles the disposal of his brother finally results in murder. Rather than driving his brother from his kingdom (as he did with the Syrian king), Herod places him in a cistern for twelve years, hoping for twelve years that the problem will take care of itself. When it doesn’t, the tetrarch has his brother strangled. Naturally, it is in their uncontrolled form that many emotions are perceived as troublesome and unacceptable, and it is precisely such destructive outbreaks which help to stigmatise these emotions further. If aggression is not denied, on the other hand, it can become a general expression of a person’s healthy energy. Indeed, Vaillant draws particular attention to the impulsiveness of very healthy individuals (*Adaptation* 54).

To prove the resourcefulness of human nature, the implied author ensures that his fictional characters are given equal opportunity for experience. Wilde’s fictional universe does not even care to consider any nature/nurture debate about personality development. The fictional setting in *Salomé* meets the requirements laid out by Skynner (*Life* 5) in that every character’s physical and material security is guaranteed. Even the imprisoned prophet gets his food for free. In addition,

none of the play's characters – regardless of their backgrounds – are presented as emotionally deprived. There is therefore no reason to distinguish oneself for the sake of public approval, because this approval has never been denied in the first place. Everyone has a structural chance at reciprocated love, and in addition, there are no social groups who are a priori excluded from certain experiences. Social mobility is the key feature of Herod's court, and the Syrian's fate demonstrates that social roles are arbitrary and constantly fleeting: "His father was a king. I drove him from his kingdom. And you made a slave of his mother, who was a queen, Herodias. So he was here as my guest, as it were, and for that reason I made him my captain" (CW 562). The play's structure makes it clear that every character can find himself in every possible situation and position at any time, and that it is therefore adaptive and vital to have one's whole emotional spectrum at one's disposal. At the same time, status or "personality" do not give any character a privileged understanding of life. Everybody in *Salomé* has access to the public realm, and it is experience gained in social interaction which is presented as valuable in Wilde's play.

Unfortunately, the critical evaluation of the ethics of *Salomé* is in itself enormously hampered by perceptive distortions underlying much of the ethical argument. This problem might indeed be inevitable given the fact that, as Skynner points out, people with average health, "because they are in a big majority, and *in the absence of any criteria by which to judge themselves differently*, . . . tend to regard their way of operating as absolutely 'normal' and 'natural' and 'healthy'" (*Life* 66; my emphasis). Matthew Lewsadder has devoted an amusing article to the obdurate unwillingness of censors and critics to accept sexuality as an important and indeed agreeable aspect of Wilde's play. Even Austin Quigley's article on realism in *Salomé* cannot refrain from referring to certain aspects of human nature as "raw animality" or "apparently sub-human" (107). In addition, much of the criticism is concerned with creating or exaggerating emotional or perceptual differences between men and women on the one hand, or heterosexuality and homosexuality on the other. With respect to the play's intended meaning this is very sad, since the implied author obviously goes to great lengths in establishing exactly such criteria by which the majority of readers might be willing and able to judge themselves and others differently. The use of many explicit ethical propositions like "Kings have but one neck, like other folk" (CW 554) or "God is in what is evil, even as He is in what is good" (CW 563) makes the promotion of realistic relativism the most didactic aspect of the play. Evidently, however, most of the alleged differences in the realm of human experience which the play's structure set out to dismiss have since been reinstated by critics.

The familiarisation of seemingly threatening emotions like aggression constitutes the implied author's most challenging task. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the play presents

the affiliative attitude as the basic state of mind of an unimpeded human being, and to underline such an assertion, the implied author must attempt to explain any instance of unfriendliness as a symptom of stress or anxiety. Indeed, no instance of aggression in the play is presented as unmotivated, and none of these explanations is placed outside the action. By now, scientific research has confirmed the traumatic effects of social exclusion on the individual psyche (Eisenberger et al.), as well as the inevitable occurrence of vengefulness as a consequence of public humiliation (Baumeister 132-134). Wilde had to rely on his intuition alone. Yet, a look at the episodes of verbal or physical violence in *Salomé* reveals that the implied author is acutely aware of the link between aggression and loss of face. In order to secure the implied reader's sympathy for his characters, he carefully establishes a precise cause-and-effect relationship between an episode of public humiliation and resulting feelings of vengefulness. This aspect might not catch the eye of a reader who is not unusually sensitive to embarrassment, but in Wilde's collected works, loss of face constitutes a theme which is taken up over and over again. Embarrassment can be regarded as an emotion to which Wilde was particularly prone, and he might expect his implied reader to be equally sensitive in this respect.

In *Salomé*, we find numerous episodes of public embarrassment, each resulting in vengefulness. Next to the loss of an attachment figure, loss of face resulting in possible social exclusion is presented as the dominant type of crisis in the play. In the previous chapter, I have already commented on the effects which comments like "He was terrible to look upon" (CW 554) have on the self-esteem of Jokanaan, forcing him to go into hiding and shout abuse at the sort of women who tend to ignore him. By shouting out from his cistern for everyone to hear, Jokanaan in turn slanders Herodias in public; indeed, he even fantasizes about her public reprobation by the hand of God (CW 558). That the queen's anger is well-founded is text-internally corroborated by the fact that Salomé herself understands the reference to her mother and feels offended on her behalf: "But he is terrible, he is terrible" (CW 558). Herod in particular is sensitive to a loss of face in public, especially as his respectability as a person is dependent on his respectability as a king. Not surprisingly, Herod's fury at the king of Cappadocia is linked to a preceding episode of public humiliation: "He has even insulted my ambassadors. He has spoken words that were wounding. But Cæsar will crucify him when he comes to Rome" (CW 569). Once he has given his oath to Salomé, Herodias is eager to point out to him the public embarrassment his defeat brings: "Everybody heard you. You swore it before everybody" (CW 570). Also Salomé's public self-esteem is seriously damaged following her confrontation with the prophet, as her final monologue suggests: "Thou didst speak evil words against me. Thou didst treat me as a harlot, as a wanton, me, Salomé, daughter of Herodias, Princess of Judæa" (CW 574). It is this acute

awareness of cause and effect which allows the implied author to accept certain uncomfortable parts of a person's personality as an inevitable result of specific circumstances, rather than springing from an inherently evil human nature. Now that he knows his characters, the implied author can love them. After all, it is an enormous sign of confidence that an author has the courage to present his intended heroine in a state of near frenzy by the time of the prophet's execution, confirming the objective horribleness of her appearance with evaluative stage directions ("*The PAGE recoils*", "*The SOLDIERS recoil*" [CW 573]), and still expecting the other characters as well as the implied reader to sympathise with her only moments later.

Realistic Symbolism

In addition to the fictional content, the play's realism is also reflected in its structure and style. Quigley has already noticed that *Salomé* explicitly deals with both realistic and symbolist ways of perception and reflection. Rather than seeing realism and symbolism as mutually exclusive, however, I suggest alternatively that Wilde had recognized the realistic potential in the symbolist technique. The use of symbolist parallelisms and repetitions helps to highlight the "same stuff" connecting mankind, while the use of vague images allows for a varied range of emotional connotations, both good and bad.

On a structural level in Wilde's play, the moon as a symbol for various fictional characters mirrors the good as well as the bad qualities existing side by side in every human being. This balance of beauty and gloom is established in the very first lines of the play:

THE YOUNG SYRIAN: How beautiful is the Princess Salomé to-night!

THE PAGE OF HERODIAS: Look at the moon! How strange the moon seems! She is like a woman rising from a tomb. She is like a dead woman. You would fancy she was looking for dead things. (CW 552)

It is important to note that it is the affiliative and thus life-affirming statement of the Young Syrian which opens the play, rather than the Page's apparently life-negating comment. The affiliative attitude takes precedence in the implied author's mind. The Syrian's reply "She has a strange look. She is like a little princess" (CW 552) establishes a direct connection between these two aspects, an example of good and bad coming together in one person, here the Princess Salomé. While the use of the pronoun "she" (rather than "it") for the French "elle" (referring to "la lune") makes the connection between the moon and the play's protagonist more pronounced in the English translation compared to the French original, it does so at the expense of weakening a similar connection between the moon and the other characters. The symbolist vagueness of the images lets the moon serve as an allusion to all of the play's main characters, male and female. This signals that none of the play's experiences are in any way gender-specific. Jokanaan as well

as Salomé and Herod hide their faces in the course of the play, while the Young Syrian seeks to hide the queen's "nakedness" by not comprehending the prophet's allusions. Salomé, Herod, and Herodias, as well as the Syrian, are looking for lovers for themselves, while Jokanaan and Herodias are jealously stalking other lovers. Salomé, Herod, Herodias, Jokanaan and the Syrian are looking for dead people at some point in the play, some in order to keep them dead, some in order to awaken them, some with death as a goal. Symbolically, the play thus affirms the "same stuff" in the cast as a whole, but unfortunately this technique is structurally less visible in the English version of the play.

Particularly striking in *Salomé* is the recurrence of certain interpersonal constellations, reflecting the opposing subjective experiences for each member of this constellation. The permanent change of constellations can be seen as the most important structural feature of the plot, and Wilde's most important innovation within the *Salomé* tradition. The dominant type of situation in the play is that of a person A paying exclusive attention to an indifferent person B, while at the same time neglecting person C, who is in turn preoccupied with person A and hostile towards B. Various critics, such as Lawler, have already commented on this "complex dance of transformations" (255), but they have paid less attention to the invariability of the emotions attached to each position. The emotions displayed by the individuals in question are presented as entirely situation-specific, regardless of gender or sexual orientation, depending only on their respective positions within the constellation. Characters appear "locked" into a certain way of thinking and acting. Once their positions change, so do their emotions and their perception of reality. The universality and inevitability of certain emotions in specific situations, as well as the limited objective truth value of subjective evaluation, is thus made obvious to the reader.

These parallels, as well as the awareness that emotions are relative to position, come together in the mind of the reader (and critic), but it is questionable in how far the intricateness of the complex situations *can* be resolved on a fictional level. There are indeed few signs of any character's conscious insight into these mechanisms, except maybe in the case of Salomé. A study conducted by Baumeister supports Wilde's intuition that the same person is quite capable of being a victim in one situation and a perpetrator in another without drawing any connection between these two experiences. The perpetrator's perspective is not on the victim's mind and the victim's perspective is not on the perpetrator's mind (42). Yet, Baumeister does not address the question if a person might alter his future self-assessment if this mechanism was explicitly pointed out to him. In *Salomé*, on the other hand, the implied author seems to suggest that awareness would not make any difference. In position A, a character will necessarily experience emotion A and try to act accordingly, regardless of any awareness that position and emotion B or

C exist independently. Before she succumbs to Jokanaan's influence herself, the princess is presented as comprehending the Syrian's state of mind, and she manages to take advantage of it while at the same time increasing his subjective feeling of happiness:

SALOMÉ (*smiling*): You will do this thing for me, Narraboth. You know that you will do this thing for me. And to-morrow when I pass in my litter by the bridge of the idol-buyers, I will look at you through the muslin veils, I will look at you, Narraboth, it may be I will smile at you. Look at me, Narraboth, look at me. Ah! you know that you will do what I ask of you. You know it well. . . . I know that you will do this thing. (CW 557; ellipsis in original)

Yet, even if Salomé might be able to fully experience someone else's respective position, she cannot alter her own behaviour. The only thing she might be able to realise is that others are equally locked into their respective situations, and that their course of action will be as predictable as her own. Likewise, Salomé's final speech to Jokanaan's head signals that she comprehends his preoccupation with God, but that this awareness nevertheless cannot alleviate her situation. The uncontrollability of certain emotions, which some critics see as a flaw of character (e.g. Donohue, "Distance" 131), might eventually turn out to be a realistic fact which the implied author seeks to acknowledge and accept.

Up to this point, critics are mostly willing to follow the subtle directions towards realism in *Salomé*, even if their idea of realism is mostly restricted to exposing the unattractive parts of human nature (e.g. Nassaar, "Renaissance"). It is with respect to his third aim that the implied author's realistic technique meets resistance, although his obvious point of view manifests itself rather explicitly. After having established good and bad in everyone alike, the implied author takes a closer look at these seemingly "bad" aspects in order to reevaluate them and question their badness. One way to make Herodias' sexual licentiousness appear less offensive is to clothe the accounts of her affairs in the most beautiful language. Jeffrey Wallen acknowledges that "the expression of desire is rendered in aesthetic form" in Wilde's play, for reasons that are "not clear" to him (124). To demonstrate the social acceptability of uninhibited sexuality, the implied author furthermore lets it go unopposed on a fictional level. Herodias has her sexual adventures, and so has Herod. Both are aware of the other's affairs and neither of them objects to what the partner does. The queen's love life is so familiar to everyone at court that Salomé herself has little difficulty in comprehending the prophet's cryptic allusions. No one but Herodias reacts to Jokanaan's exclamations because nobody understands why the queen should feel offended in the first place. In order to express the naturalness and "goodness" of Salomé's own desire for physical contact with Jokanaan, the implied author becomes even bolder: the Holy Bible and the figure of Christ himself are called upon as independent evidence. I have already mentioned that Wilde accepted the example of Christ only to the extent in which it corroborates his own

argument. In *Salomé*, this reference to Biblical evidence as a rhetorical strategy is done very elegantly. Not only do Salomé's incantations to Jokanaan echo the Song of Songs (as various critics have noted), but Christ himself appears in the play as an off-stage character, walking through Judea healing lepers "simply by touching them" (CW 564). This, however, is precisely what Salomé wants to do with Jokanaan – touch him, and how can an imitation of Christ be sinful?

The stylistic level repeats this thematic subversion of the traditional concepts of good and bad. The concept of "looking for dead things" (CW 552) is a good example to illustrate this point. The image is used by the Page to allude to the general atmosphere of the play's plot development – symbolised by the moon – as well as Salomé's intentions in particular. The traditional conception of being dead is that of a finite, sterile state, and Salomé's interest in Jokanaan is therefore often associated with necrophilia. With respect to the Saviour's miracles, however, death is presented as a starting point for re-awakening. Again, the implied author makes an explicit reference to Christ who raises the dead (CW 565). Unless the reader wants to accuse the figure of Christ himself of necrophilia, his interest in dead people must be taken as a sign of an affiliative attitude. This subversion, in turn, lets Salomé's interest for Jokanaan appear in a new light. Leaving the banquet hall "like a woman rising from a tomb" (CW 552), the princess insists on having the prophet released from his own "tomb" (CW 556), so that they – by mutually falling in love – could imitate a physical and spiritual reawakening, symbolised by the "white" imagery of her first love incantation (CW 558-59). Yet, the implied author does not try to replace negative connotations with good ones in a purely subversive style, but rather seeks to establish a peaceful coexistence between positive and negative aspects, suspending an either one-sided optimistic or pessimistic judgment. By the time of Jokanaan's execution, Salomé's attitude again reflects the conventional negative connotations of the concept, as she addresses the Page: "Come hither, thou wert the friend of him who is dead, is it not so? Well, I tell thee, there are not dead men enough" (CW 573).

A stylistic reevaluation is also undertaken with respect to the alleged incompatibility of God, love, and vengefulness as a portal towards greater understanding. Here a succession of images establishes a connection between the drunken and infatuated tetrarch, the raving prophet, Salomé, and the all-governing moon:

HERODIAS: I do not believe in omens. [This prophet] speaks like a drunken man.

HEROD: It may be he is drunk with the wine of God.

HERODIAS: What wine is that, the wine of God? From what vineyards is it gathered? In what winepress may one find it?

HEROD (*from this point he looks all the while at Salomé*) [CW 566]

This passage is, in addition, the strongest example of the implied author's sympathy with Herod's desire for Salomé. While the tetrarch's infatuation is passed off as "lecherous leering" by critics like Quigley (109), the structure of the play tries to convey the beneficial spiritual side effects which even such an "illicit" form of desire can have for the individual. By changing *Salomé* from a written text into a performed play, thus deleting the ethical function of such explicit stage directions, it is mostly the emotional impact of the implied author's affiliative and accepting attitude towards his creation which would be lost to the audience.

Realism on a Fictional Level – The Reluctant Cast

We are again in a situation where an implied author sits with a particular insight which he can choose to share or not to share with his creation. Following Skynner's line of thinking, it should in fact be the healthiest people who are very much like one another, rather than trying to distinguish themselves. Since they appreciate the similarity of all human beings, they have a reason to be open and affiliative. For one, healthy people display an awareness of both their positive and negative sides; in addition, they are able to relate to negative characteristics observed in others. After all, one cannot love what one does not know, and in order to appreciate an emotion as good because natural, one has to live through it oneself and test its value. Realistic perceptions about others can only be gained via realistic perceptions about the self, and although certain character traits are observed in others first, they will necessarily be accepted in others last. This recognition makes for a rewarding examination of the character building in *Salomé*. According to Bakhtin, an insight which is shared by an author and his creation should manifest itself on a fictional level with the cast consciously repeating the implied author's technique. Yet, of all the aspects of health, realism causes the greatest discrepancy between structural ethos and general fictional ethos in *Salomé*. The existence (and hopefully acceptance) of the "same stuff," which becomes so obvious to the reader, is denied and counteracted on a fictional level by most characters.

In "The Birthday of the Infanta," Wilde wittily exposes the drawback of class distinctions: "On ordinary days, she was only allowed to play with children of her own rank, so she had always to play alone, but her birthday was an exception" (CW 234). In *Salomé*, then, the onset looks nothing but promising: The former nobility shares its wealth and lifestyle with the lower orders, for the simple fact that they are good company. Ironically, however, while emotional and social equality is already practiced at Herod's court, most of the characters are trying to keep this fact a secret, thus denying their own recognition and acceptance of the "same stuff." On the surface, as well as in the minds of people, the fascination with stereotypical roles is very much

alive, be it only for the sake of distinction. Salomé's observations about the role play of the painted guests at Herod's banquet describe an almost absurd scenario: "They are rough and common, and they give themselves the airs of noble lords" (CW 555). Apparently, the artificiality of this role play should be as obvious to the other characters as it is to Salomé, but still everybody acts as if no one else had noticed a thing.

It might be acceptable that people withdraw into daydreaming if that makes them able to bear living in a dysfunctional network. However, the implied author in *Salomé* makes it clear that this fictional network is *not* hostile, and that unrealistic distortions are therefore more detrimental than helpful. It is enough that each character disowns a different aspect of his own nature, and the result is a climate where nothing can be discussed without constraint, since there is always someone who will take offence at something. One thing is indeed striking about Wilde's fictional universe: While all other people are seen in their true proportion and complexity, the individual in *Salomé* still dwells in delusions about his own omnipotence and purity. In a society where everyone's eyes are watchfully turned outwards, the self remains the last enigma.

Herodias denies her own active role with respect to her adultery, putting all the blame on her husband instead: "It was you who tore me from his arms" (CW 566). The reader can see for himself that the queen's pose as a victim is absurd. There are always two people involved in adultery, and Shakespeare himself did not let himself get fooled when he wrote *Hamlet*. Yet, while Herod is honest enough to accept his share of responsibility ("Of a truth, I was stronger" [CW 566]), his wife is unwilling to do the same. That the repression of her own sense of responsibility is a very difficult process shows itself in the queen's seemingly inexplicable irritability over the prophet's insults. Eventually, her preoccupation with keeping the problem out of sight seriously limits the queen's functionality, and the implied author has this deficiency explicitly pointed out to her by the tetrarch:

HERODIAS: You are looking again at my daughter. You must not look at her. I have already said so.

HEROD: You say nothing else.

HERODIAS: I say it again. (CW 566)

While the queen is able to find her husband's lack of loyalty morally questionable, her judgment does not extend to her own behaviour. The tetrarch, on his part, has serious deficiencies with respect to anger management, as I have noted earlier. While he is concerned about aggression observed in others, he denies it as a part of himself. His wife is the person to point this double standard out to him: "What is it to you if she dance on blood? Thou hast waded deep enough therein" (CW 569). Similarly, Jokanaan objects to the queen's sexuality, while denying it as a part of his own nature. Salomé understands and even condones her mother's and Herod's sexuality,

while distancing herself from the idea. The Syrian claims not even to understand the prophet's suggestions.

"I am the slave of my word, and my word is the word of a king" (CW 569) – Herod's comment comprises the essential dilemma of any attempt to distinguish oneself in order to gain public approval. By denying parts of one's nature that one perceives as undesirable, one risks not having a certain emotion available when it is needed. Therefore the chosen role cannot be played effectively, or the task can be carried out as effectively by someone who is not "qualified." Herod does not have any authority at his own court or in the larger political realm. In contrast, Salomé – by basing her authority on her personal attractiveness – can make the Syrian disregard Herod's order, and she also makes the Tetrarch follow *her* to the terrace as she refuses to come with him. Also the queen's proud reliance on her status of wife and mother is unfounded, since her husband does nothing to defend her honour and her daughter disobeys her wishes. Jokanaan, too, is weakened rather than strengthened by his new role. The repression of his human emotions and his withdrawal from social interaction make him an unreliable judge of human affairs. Events do not occur in agreement with his prophecies, the wrong persons react to his exclamations, things happen earlier than expected and not to the right people, and Jokanaan is constantly forced to adjust the appropriateness of his prophecies to reflect a reality which has already happened. In addition, the other characters demonstrate that it is possible to make predictions and have forebodings without having to deny half of their nature. The events of the play are no more in accordance with Jokanaan's prophecies than with the premonitions of anyone else.

It must be said that the way in which the royal couple openly challenge each other's illusions in Wilde's play is in itself not very dysfunctional (comp. Satir 17). Herod and Herodias could be "partners in crime," and the tetrarch makes several efforts to establish an honest dialogue with his wife, so that both can acknowledge their good and their bad sides (e.g. CW 562). The queen, however, is unwilling to do so, leaving her husband with the impression that he alone is flawed: "My daughter and I come from a royal race. As for thee, thy father was a camel driver! He was also a robber" (CW 562). Indeed, the feeling of being the only faulty being among impeccable ones might cause the phenomenon of guilt and shame in the first place. At the same time, Herod is unwilling to simply admit to his lowly background or his thievery, which makes it impossible for his wife to have any realistic discussion with him. The play's paradox lies in the fact that all pieces of text-internal evidence point into the same direction, namely that personal popularity is altogether independent of social status or politically correct behaviour. If Herod is the son of a camel driver, so is his brother, and yet Herodias saw no problem marrying either of them. In addition, even uncomfortable emotions are accepted by the court as a whole. Herod's

violence is well-known, yet never subject of critical debate. The queen's extramarital affairs are condoned by everyone at court except the prophet, who – according to Herod – “has said nothing against you” (CW 563).

As complex as the situation presents itself, the implied author is extremely cautious about where to put the blame. Indeed, the prophet might be seen as the cause of all evil, playing the rest of the cast off against each other, but in reality his presence at court only makes transparent the other characters' attempts at avoiding reality. By becoming structurally involved and removing one problematic character from the fictional setting, the implied author would only spare his other characters from dealing with their own faults. It is therefore important that the extinction of the scapegoat Jokanaan does not dissolve the self-delusion at Herod's court, and that it does not bring the royal couple closer together. Although the play's setting offers the opportunity to embrace and confess the good and the bad sides of one's personality, no mutually supportive network is established by the characters in the story. Obviously, someone has to make a start and own up to his shortcomings, thus generating a realistic and accepting climate; nevertheless, every character expects others to take the first step. Yet, the implied author in *Salomé* is clear about one thing: Any attempt at promoting realism in one's environment has to start with personal initiative, and human encounter is the means to becoming acquainted with oneself and the world.

The drawback of human friendship is that we are generally attracted to people who affirm our perceptions of the world, simply because they have denied the same aspects of their nature as we have ourselves (Skynner, *Families* 39-40; Satir 9). Of course, as long as our self-delusion is never challenged, we feel no reason to change. For that reason, Wilde is far more interested in the portrayal of unrequited love. Being refused puts a lover's realism to the test, both with respect to the self and the object of desire. People tend to be more honest to those they do not seek to impress, so a disinterested beloved is more likely to give the infatuated lover realistic feedback. At the same time, it is difficult and indeed unnecessary to idealise a person who does not do one any favours, so the moment of rejection can be the key to a realistic assessment of other people's inherent value. In *Salomé*, all romantic longings apart from the queen's sexual encounters are unrequited. This gives the characters the opportunity to become realistic about their own as well as their beloved's value – without becoming pessimistic. Where everybody else fails, Salomé succeeds. Her character is the only one who manages to repeat the implied author's realism in her own consciousness.

At the beginning of the play, the princess is herself unrealistic with respect to two important aspects of her nature. First of all, while she acknowledges the artificiality of social status in others, she nonetheless perceives of her own royal superiority as genuine. In addition,

she disowns her own sexual feelings while she condones them in her mother and her stepfather. For the purpose of self-development, Jokanaan is therefore presented as the perfect choice for Salomé, both on the basis of her own and on the basis of the implied author's slightly different expectations. For the princess herself, the prophet is the perfect match since he – like her – is “chaste as the moon is” (CW 558). In addition, as many critics have noted, Jokanaan's repressed sexuality and anger are showing through, which only adds to Salomé's fascination. When Willoughby criticizes the fictional prophet for “refus[ing] contact with the one character who is not only as chaste and proud as himself, but who shares his contempt for the world around him” (78), he therefore seems to miss the play's main point. The implied author tries to make clear that Salomé's chastity and pride are bad and unrealistic qualities which have to disappear to give her access to her full emotional spectrum. Therefore, he has other plans for his protagonist. He knows that Jokanaan is the only member of Herod's court who, due to his own repression, will be absolutely disinclined to flatter the princess. Cruelty is considered a healthy emotion by Skynner as long as it is defined as hurting people for their own good (*Families* 36-38). Like a psychiatrist, then, the implied author in *Salomé* has to “put people through very painful experiences if they are to face their problems and get over them” (*Families* 38). From a structural point of view, the rejection by the prophet is arranged for Salomé's own good.

The fact that the princess feels sexually unthreatened by the chaste Jokanaan, combined with the fact that she assumes her own interest in the prophet to be purely platonic, takes away her need to observe her own sexual feelings. Yet once Salomé's own sensuality is for a moment not consciously suppressed, it emerges naturally. Her reflection “His flesh must be cool like ivory. I would look closer at him” (CW 558) demonstrates that one's own conscious acknowledgment is at all times lagging behind the true impulses of the body. While Salomé still claims to have a strictly platonic interest in the prophet, she is already experiencing the touch in her mind. However, once she approaches the prophet, Salomé's sexual desire is kindled, and she embraces this new impulse without ever looking back. The white nature imagery of her first incantation mirrors her perception of sexual desire as natural and unthreatening (e.g. “the breast of the moon when she lies on the breast of the sea” [CW 559]). It is only the prophet's opposition which changes the connotations of Salomé's desire, adding notions of forceful exploitation and excess.

The intensity of her longing combined with Jokanaan's opposition and insults bring the formerly faultless princess into a situation where she herself begins to experience unbecoming emotions. This in turn makes her capable of recognizing as well as accepting the fact that every person, as well as life in general, has good and bad sides. Thus, the structure of Salomé's

speeches repeats on a small scale the implied author's general method of structural realism. At least one consciousness in the fictional setting partakes in the realistic insight shared by implied author and reader. Salomé is able to see good and bad coming together in one person. She sees the obvious filth covering Jokanaan's body and hair, without losing sight of the beauty underneath. The "great cedars of Lebanon" in her second stream of consciousness, which are as black as Jokanaan's hair, give their shade to lions and robbers as much as anyone else (*CW* 559). While she tried to distance herself from the rough and common people at the beginning of the play, Salomé is now aware of the equal value of all human beings. Her affiliative attitude enables her furthermore to explain Jokanaan's unresponsiveness as a result of his religion, rather than expression of his true personality: "Behind thine hands and thy curses thou didst hide thy face. Thou didst put upon thine eyes the covering of him who would see his God. Well, thou hast seen thy God, Jokanaan, but me, me, thou didst never see" (*CW* 574).

The acknowledgment of her own negative sides enables Salomé also to relate to others by recognizing shared emotional states. Her third incantation to Jokanaan alludes to the prophet's lust for wrath (comp. Isaiah 63:3) as well as Herod's streaks of violence: "Thy mouth is redder than the feet of those who tread the wine in the wine-press. . . . It is redder than the feet of him who cometh from a forest where he hath slain a lion" (*CW* 559; my ellipsis). By accepting her own violence, she is able to accept the same impulses in others. Salomé's final task in her development towards realistic perceptions is to experience the badness that is in her, the evil feelings she is able to feel under the given circumstances, and yet acknowledge these emotions as a true part of her nature. It is after she has witnessed her own behaviour around Jokanaan's execution that she is able to say "If thou hadst seen me thou wouldst have loved me. I, I saw thee, Jokanaan, and I loved thee" (*CW* 574). Just like Salomé "saw" the complexity in her beloved's personality, her violent reaction to her rejection by Jokanaan has made it possible for others to "see" her now in her complexity.

The play's violent finale is of special significance for the discussion of evil, although it asks a lot of the reader to feel truly comfortable with it. Yet by experiencing the mechanisms of violence in her own person, Salomé is finally in a privileged position, and her final recollection of the play's attacks and counter-attacks signals an awareness of cause and effect. One could say that the play's complications kept the princess under constant stress, so that an objective evaluation of the situation has simply not been possible until this moment. As Baumeister notes, a person with a sound self-esteem is not prone to violence, since this person will not feel offended by occasional unqualified insults (26). Had Salomé's self-esteem been realistic by the time she encountered Jokanaan, she would therefore not have been forced to insult the prophet back,

would not have provoked him further, and she would not have offended Herod, who originally had nothing to do with the matter. Finally, however, Salomé has the possibility to stop the anger by not countering the attack. If violence starts with the individual, it can also end with the individual. Wilde's seriousness about Christ-like self-sacrifice (Willoughby 22-23) should by no means be underestimated, but it only makes sense if it springs from a character's realistic awareness of the mechanisms of wrong-doing, rather than unpremeditated altruism.

Salomé has the possibility to end the series of attacks and counter-attacks by letting it end with her. Her acceptance of death is her offer to both Jokanaan and Herod, and the implied author explicitly links this offer to the idea of unselfish love: "[T]he mystery of love is greater than the mystery of death. Love only should one consider" (CW 574). In the final stage direction, her character is crushed beneath the soldiers' shields as "daughter of Herodias, Princess of Judæa" (CW 575). Many critics – and I include myself during the first couple of reading experiences – are outraged by this designation, since it conforms to both the prophet's and the tetrarch's original prejudices against the protagonist. With this reaction, however, we only reveal that we on our part would be willing to hit back once more, and let the vicious circle continue. This is precisely what the implied author seeks to prevent. By placing Salomé's execution right at the end of his play, he chooses not to challenge Herod's and Jokanaan's prejudices any further. The placement of the event is thus an ethical choice (comp. Nissen 268).

In addition, it should be noted that Salomé refers to herself as "daughter of Herodias, Princess of Judæa," both the first time and the last time she addresses Jokanaan. If she is the "daughter of Herodias" because of her interest in sensual pleasures, that is certainly true, and Salomé can find as little fault in her mother's sexuality as in her own. By the end of the play, the "Princess of Judæa" is also worthy to represent her country. Judging from Salomé's angle, the final stage direction ends in a compliment.

Chapter 3: The Lifting of the Veil – Encouragement of Transparency

Wilde and the Attitude Theory of Emotion

A realistic acceptance of their emotional make-up, as Skynner explains, enables healthy people to communicate openly as well as express their energies outwardly. I would like to look at Skynner's concept of expressiveness in greater detail, by linking it to the "Attitude Theory of Emotion" advanced by the psychologist Nina Bull in 1951. This still little-known but important theory (Pribram 116) proves extremely relevant to the analysis of *Salomé*, all the more since it is almost identical to an idea advanced by Wilde himself.

In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the character of Lord Henry complains about the "self-denial that mars our lives":

We are punished for our refusals. Every impulse that we strive to strangle broods in the mind, and poisons us. The body sins once, and has done with its sin, for action is a mode of purification. Nothing remains then but the recollection of a pleasure, or the luxury of a regret. The only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it. Resist it, and your soul grows sick with longing for the things it has forbidden to itself, with desire for what its monstrous laws have made monstrous and unlawful. It has been said that the great events of the world take place in the brain. It is in the brain, and the brain only, that the great sins of the world take place also. (CW 29)

Lord Henry's theory predicts, in short, that repressed impulses become physically painful for the individual concerned, and that they will inevitably cause cognitive obsession unless they are granted an adequate outlet. Physical action is therefore not to be seen as a lack of discipline, but on the contrary as necessary and vital in that it helps restoring physical and mental health. Coming from Lord Henry, and seemingly excusing the subsequent actions of Dorian Gray, this statement has so far at best been interpreted as the purposefully provocative and ironic remark on the part of the novel's implied author. As a serious contribution to psychology, on the other hand, Wilde's theory has so far been confined to obscurity.

Given the fact that science is always taken more seriously than philosophy, it might interest a critic of Wilde to hear that his idea has since been confirmed by empirical research. Sixty years after *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was published, scientific experiments with body posture led the American psychologist Nina Bull to the following conclusion about the mechanism of emotion:

According to [William] James' famous explanation we do not cry because we first feel sorry, as people generally think, but just the reverse. His thesis was that the sorry feelings come "because we cry." But according to the present theory, the sorry feeling is mediated by the attitude of readiness, or fixing, to cry, and not by actually crying. The fact is that we feel *less* sorry when we start to cry in good earnest; and crying that is violent enough

eliminates the sorry feeling altogether. The same holds true of anger and fear, and so, from the present point of view, we feel angry as a result of *readiness* to strike, and feel afraid as a result of *readiness* to run away, and not because of actually hitting out or running, as James explained the sequence. In other words, feeling, in the sense of affect, arises from involuntary motor attitude, maintained as readiness or wish, and held in leash pending the lifting of whatever form of interfering mechanism, or functional barrier, is holding up the action. (5-6)

Bull's train of thought is identical to the one advanced by Wilde, and clad in scientific language it sounds far less provocative. The most important implication of her theory is that a satisfying human existence revolves around action, not "feeling"; Bull, too, regards action as a mode of purification. Yet, in the course of evolution, man has come out of touch with his own nature: "In poorly oriented emotional reactions, various feelings of organic preparation tend to obtrude themselves in consciousness as vague suspense, excitement, tension, restlessness, nervousness, etc., without an adequately oriented mental component to whip the process into shape and give it point" (Bull 10). For various reasons, we do no longer do what we want to do, or we are no longer aware of what we feel like doing. Consequently, Bull describes the enhancement of a person's self-awareness with respect to each motor attitude as essential to optimal functioning, since "the finding of its precise value in terms of conscious feeling and intention is clearly essential to self-knowledge and intelligent self-regulation" (21). The aspiration of the individual developing towards greater health would be, according to Bull, to become aware of the exact wish for concrete action which is lurking behind any diffuse and vague emotional states.

The natural question which arises is of course *why* there should be any need to prevent an unconscious motor impulse from manifesting itself in direct action, and instead causing the phenomenon we experience as "feeling." In many cases, so Bull, it is just a matter of timing, which means that the exact motor attitude as well as the object it is directed towards is recognized by the organism. The resulting "feeling of mental attitude" consists in a "more or less conscious readiness for action" (8-9). In this situation, "where there is no opposition to the preparatory attitude, the feelings that arise are of a pleasant, anticipatory character" (18). Obviously, however, such pleasant feelings are not what Wilde's Lord Henry has in mind, and it is not difficult to see the reason why: In most cases, direct action is restrained due to some form of opposition. Bull explains: "But many motor attitudes fail to arrive at any such developed state of conscious and appropriate preparedness for action, sometimes because the time is not yet ripe or the situation not propitious, sometimes because of too much complication; but often because the action is socially taboo" (19). In this case, she continues,

[F]unctional barriers have to be erected to hold the consummatory act in check. As a result, these interrupted attitudes may persist for an indefinite period of time as blind subconscious urges . . . held (more or less) in check by other blind subconscious urges in

the form of secondary motor attitudes that interrupt and interfere with them. These are familiar factors in the complex states of mind and body with which psychoanalysis has largely concerned itself under such general headings as *conflict, frustration, blockage* and *repression*, depending on the type of interference. (19)

Already the wording of Bull's statement reflects how active, complicated and energy-consuming a process the mechanism of repression really is. Apart from "confusion in the realm of feeling," Bull underlines, a conflict of motor attitudes "often [leads] to bodily distress as well; and it always paralyzes action to some extent" (10). Obviously, where so much energy is used to prevent the organism from unfolding itself, this energy will invariably be lacking in other areas of functioning. Contrary to the traditional view on the subject, such mental and physical symptoms of repression do not simply fade, but can persist infinitely "as in the characteristic posture of the body, carriage of the head and expression of the face" (17).

According to Wilde's and Bull's theory of repression, an originally adaptive mechanism for the control of socially disruptive and violent impulses (comp. Baumeister 14) is increasingly used to hold back impulses which are only vaguely described as "socially taboo." Rather than the intention itself being unacceptable, the undisclosed taboo could as well spring from the social environment's inability to deal with certain emotions. Seen from this angle, any unconscious decision to block or not to block an impulse reflects an equally unconscious evaluation as to its social appropriateness. This of course brings us back to Skynner's promotion of expressiveness. In a healthy and realistic network, following Skynner's argument, "energy" is expressed outwardly because all impulses are accepted by the individual, and because the individual has no reason to fear any opposition from within the network, being confident that others can deal with the results of this "energy" (*Life* 30).

The second important aspect about Wilde's and Bull's respective theories is that repression is not seen as an adaptive defence mechanism which can be switched on and off, but rather as a general lack of cognitive self-awareness. A person can either learn to recognize all kinds of motor impulses, affiliative as well as hostile, or must be discouraged from recognizing any. If repression is seen as socially desirable because it dampens people's violent tendencies, one must not forget that affiliative tendencies will become equally discouraged from unfolding themselves. After all, the impulse to strike out and the impulse to caress do not arise in two different types of people. Realistic self-awareness, according to Bull, means therefore to become aware of both affiliative and non-affiliative wishes for action, rather than vague "feelings." The Attitude Theory thus constitutes a twist to Skynner's promotion of self-awareness as a means to increased personal well-being. Growing awareness and acceptance of one's own impulses might go hand in hand with growing conscious frustration about the fact that one's surroundings do not

find these impulses acceptable. Many psychologists and therapists might even agree with this view while at the same time shrugging their shoulders. Generally, the personal discomfort resulting from repression is not considered noteworthy, and social stability has to take precedence over individual homeostatic well-being (Vaillant, *Defense* 61). Unfortunately, Bull herself addresses repression as a personal rather than social phenomenon, thus restricting the relevance of her own theory to the narrow context of individual psychotherapy alone.

Wilde, on the other hand, being aware that many social taboos are based on unrealistic perceptions, cannot accept the status quo, and he does not wish to keep his fictional creation in ignorance. While still focusing on internalised taboos and individual suffering in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, he goes one step further in *Salomé*. Here, the phenomenon of repression is no longer described as a consequence of unconscious self-denial, but rather as a more or less conscious capitulation before external opposition. In addition, society in Wilde's fictional universe has to taste its own medicine, as the play's implied author outlines with full orchestration the enormous consequences for the larger social network which arise from repression forced upon the individual. In *Salomé*, unresolved conflicts and unexpressed wishes disrupt the stability of the fictional setting, affecting more and more people, and thus creating new conflicts and complications along the way. The detrimental effects of repression are presented as being cumulative, unless the vicious circle is broken by someone at some point, by means of one whole-hearted action – moral or not.

The Nexus of Repression

For one, the action of *Salomé* illustrates Wilde's previous postulation that any denied impulse persists infinitely and even grows in intensity, unless it is resolved in action. Most of the characters experience difficulties in expressing some motor attitudes in a consummatory act, and the apparent need for suppression leaves visible traces in their posture and their mind's landscape. The impulse which drives Jokanaan towards women and luxury is counteracted by an opposing impulse to retreat, so he hides himself in his cistern where he cannot be confronted with further temptation. The prophet can be seen as a representative of the common assumption that unresolved conflicts will solve themselves if one avoids further confrontation with the problem. Yet, as the development of the plot shows, his alternative focus on spirituality does not remove his problems from his mind. Instead, Jokanaan's unresolved envy finds its way into his interpretation of God's word, and he ends up exhibiting a cognitive obsession with the king's blasphemies and the queen's abominations – in the name of the Lord. His eyes become black and horrible (CW 558), as a physical sign of his lingering anger. Herod, due to his – albeit hesitant –

respect for the social taboo which prevents him from desiring his brother's daughter, tries everything to get his mind off his desire. He drowns his sorrow in wine, recognizing all the while that Salomé symbolises the true vineyard from which the wine of God is gathered (CW 566). Thus even a religious conversation returns to the topic of Salomé. Although the tetrarch repeatedly claims to be happy, his soldiers notice his "sombre look" (CW 553, 567). The same goes for the Young Syrian, who, unable to express his infatuation with the remote princess, develops "very languorous eyes" (CW 562) and whose conversations all eventually return to his obsession with Salomé.

Indeed, one particular aspect about very healthy people is their willingness to admit to themselves and others that they are having problems (Skynner, *Life* 68). Their conscious suffering might even be more intense, since they are less willing to suppress uncomfortable thoughts (Skynner, *Life* 18). In *Salomé*, the character of Herod *knows* that he does, and has to, repress his admiration for his wife's daughter: "You say that to trouble me, because I have looked at you all this evening. Your beauty troubled me. Your beauty has grievously troubled me, and I have looked at you too much. But I will look at you no more" (CW 571). Salomé, too, is *aware* of the reason for her suffering: "Thou wouldst have none of me, Jokanaan. Thou didst reject me. Thou didst speak evil words against me. Thou didst treat me as a harlot, a wanton, me, Salomé, daughter of Herodias, Princess of Judæa. . . . What shall I do now, Jokanaan? Neither the floods nor the great waters can quench my passion" (CW 574; my ellipsis). It is from such a tragic sense of blamelessness that the play's implied author derives sympathy for his fictional cast. None of his characters has chosen repression over action. If therefore critics reproach the protagonist for becoming a victim of her desire (e.g. Donohue, "Symbolist" 98), they seem to mix up cause and effect. It is not their impulses which cause the characters trouble, but the fact that they are denied an adequate outlet.

To absolve his characters from the accusation of self-indulgence, the implied author tries to outline the scope of their impairment. The mental and physical impairment caused by a suppression of impulses can go so far as to make an individual completely unable to function in society. Apart from affecting a person's mood, suppression of motor impulses can also impair an individual's cognitive abilities and physical health. Herod's attempt to divert his attention from his forbidden longing by letting his mind wander from impression to impression makes him downright forgetful (CW 562, 566). His moodiness furthermore weakens his kingship, as his wife is well aware: "You are sick. They will say at Rome that you are mad" (CW 569). Salomé, too, is mentally and physically paralysed after being refused by Jokanaan. The words "I will kiss thy mouth," i.e. the description of the action which is denied to her, are all she is able to say,

repeatedly. From the time of her rejection to the time of the dance, her character plays hardly any part in the action of the play. All of her statements are short negating phrases. She declines Herod's offers for food, drink, and her mother's throne as a place to rest. Where critics see the time of vengeful plotting, the structure of the play does not even suggest that there is any energy left to draw anger from.

The play makes obvious that repression is not an individual affair. After all, every person is someone else's company, and if a person cannot function properly as a cause of repression, this will sooner or later affect the entire network. In addition, the fact that a lingering organism will invariably look for an alternative outlet increases the risk that innocent bystanders become involved in a problem which did not originally concern them. In *Salomé*, the prophet's unresolved obsession with the love affairs of Herodias causes him to harass the queen, which wearies her so much that she in turn becomes a nuisance to her husband, who becomes estranged from her and instead falls for his wife's daughter, who flees to the terrace disowning her own sexuality, upon which she becomes attracted to the equally chaste prophet, causing the Young Syrian's suicide along the way. *Salomé* ends up being insulted as a harlot by the prophet, which in turn sets in motion another vicious circle. More and more people are drawn into the nexus of one forbidden action, which should effectively contradict the claim that repression is only relevant for the individual.

To defend his characters against the accusation of being self-indulgent, the implied author describes every direct action as a means to avoid beginning physical displeasure. This stands in marked contrast to the earlier philosophy practised Dorian Gray, who attempts to *seek* out new sensations (*CW* 32, 105). The action in *Salomé* on the other hand is more in line with Lord Henry's argument, in that it attempts to reinstate a balance that has been upset. Even the licentious queen embarked on her affairs as a reaction to an undeniable physical urge following her exposure to wall-paintings. She "gave herself up to the lust of her eyes" (*CW* 557), as Jokanaan puts it. *Salomé*'s final reflections signal that complete self-denial would have been the only alternative to the situation she finds herself in ("I was a virgin, and thou didst take my virginity from me. I was chaste, and thou didst fill my veins with fire" [*CW* 574]), and we cannot assume that the implied author intends to advocate seclusion.

Indeed, most actions in the play – moral or not – are intended to bring the aforementioned vicious circle to an end, and the relief which direct action brings is not only restricted to the agent. *Salomé* leaves the banquet hall so as to break the tension between her and Herod, making the original problem end with her. The suicide of the Young Syrian, intended to solve his own problems, simultaneously frees the Page from the spell of his unpleasant infatuation, practically

giving him his speech back. Although it constitutes his last verbal contribution to the play, his eulogy for the Syrian finally reflects the amiable part of his personality. At the same time, the death of Jokanaan brings relief to both the queen and the tetrarch. Herodias is not afraid to identify with her daughter's undisguised pursuit of desire, and she begins to feel comfortable again in the public eye, even if this provokes criticism from her husband ("There speaks the incestuous wife" [CW 574]). As far as the tetrarch is concerned, the prophet's execution releases him from the spell of conscientious hesitation. Herod's demand for Salomé's execution is the first whole-hearted action we see him perform in the course of the play.

The Communicative Aspect of Transparency

There is one aspect of the Attitude Theory which Bull addresses only in passing, while it constitutes the cornerstone in Wilde's artistic argument: the aspect of communication. Bull comments briefly on the "expressive" aspect of attitude, with its "intention to influence or make impression on others":

As a matter of fact it has always been found difficult to tell at exactly which point the social or communicative aspect of expression enters in, because the same behavior [sic] that serves the purpose of communication is serving other purposes as well, of which the individual may or may not be conscious. For example, an angry attitude may be considered as conveying a feeling of resentment; but it is also an actual preparation for the act of striking. (7)

In *contrasting* the communicative purpose with concrete preparation for action, Bull contradicts her own ideas about oriented attitudes. What else should an angry attitude constitute but the communication of the fact that one is ready to strike and that one expects the opponent to submit? And if this attitude were to be accompanied by words, why should these words not be as transparent as "I feel like striking you"? Ideally, not only the speaker but also the recipient should be oriented about the speaker's impulses; this is the very purpose of communication. Directness would orient the receiver of the message about the precise nature of the speaker's state of mind, while also giving him a chance to react. Curiously enough, Vaillant never considers open communication a mature defence mechanism in its own right (see *Defense* 39), as little as the addresses the communicative aspect of sublimation in art.

Wilde, on the other hand, is well aware of the potential and importance of open and direct communication. It is this second aspect of the Attitude Theory, purposeful communication of intention, which plays a major role in his conception of *Salomé*, as it is the meeting ground for personal interests and consideration for others. Although he is certainly unfamiliar with the Attitude Theory, San Juan is constantly on the author's tracks when he remarks on the obviousness of physical impulses underlying Wilde's technique of dramatic composition: "This

sequence . . . operates toward the fullest exposure of character. For character consists mainly of certain dominant motivations displayed in speech and gesture” (108). The author’s “all-embracing purpose,” according to San Juan, is “to sustain an action leading to the fullest revelation of character. Like Browning, therefore, Wilde intends to present ‘character in action,’ the anatomy of the soul” (108). Heidi Hartwig, too, recognizes that “Wilde dramatizes the dynamic relationship between language and action, or in strictly dramaturgical terms, between words and gestures,” which enables him “to revalue language as a type of action in its own right” (23). The model of transparency which Wilde advocates in his plays benefits both the individual and the surrounding network. What is important to his characters is the communication of intention; if the intended action is carried out or not is secondary. By communicating the precise actions they are inclined to perform, Wilde’s characters can manifest their inner lives adequately on the outside, while at the same time accepting the fact that other people might disapprove of the intended course of action. Especially the communication of hostile intentions is an important aspect of negotiation, as it is a sign of discontent with present conditions. This open form of negotiation enables an individual to manifest even controversial impulses, and it spares them from having to hide a part of their nature. At the same time, transparency is beneficial for the recipient of the message, as it keeps people informed about each others’ feelings and intentions. *Salomé* focuses much on the idea of disclosing or withholding important information, and the many critical references to religious secrecy have the function of underlining the importance of openness for society at large, especially at a time when people are supposed to learn how the world really is. Transparent communication on the part of Wilde’s fictional characters is therefore essential for the promotion of realistic perceptions in the receiver, and the reader of *Salomé* profits as much from it as the characters themselves. Openness also helps to solve interpersonal conflicts, since misinterpretations cannot be discovered unless they are communicated.

Wilde’s play is dominated by two opposite wishes for action, one positive and one negative, each giving rise to a different emotion and resulting in a different action: The affiliative impulse of looking, touching and kissing manifests itself in the “feeling” of love and desire, and results in a kiss. The hostile wish to strike underlies the feeling of anger, eventually resulting in two executions. Yet, following Bull’s argument, it is by no means certain that only those who actually perform these acts experience the respective underlying motor attitudes. Although it is only the central characters of *Salomé*, Herod, Jokanaan, and Herodias who display some degree of transparency, it should be immediately obvious that love and anger are felt by most of the characters, as becomes obvious even from their indirect communication. The emotional makeup of the cast is thus presented as identical, and those who do not act on their impulses have no more

honourable intentions than those who *do* act on them, and who are thus at least honest about them. As Lord Henry says, the great sins of the world take place in the brain. To make this point even clearer, the implied author has his protagonist Salomé confess that she has lost her virginity – simply by having become aware of the fact that she desires physical contact with Jokanaan. Thus, the implied author makes clear that he sees no difference in truth and “reality” between a preliminary motor attitude and final action. In that case, one might as well be frank about these impulses, which is precisely what Salomé, Herod, and Jokanaan are doing.

What distinguishes Salomé is that she discovers the precise motor impulse which lurks behind her feelings of “love” or “desire,” and that she communicates this intention openly. The lines she speaks contemplating Jokanaan’s looks reflect the gradual process of an oriented attitude taking shape. The awareness that his body looks like a thin ivory statue or shaft of silver is as such not of any concern to her. The young Syrian contemplated the princess in a similar fashion, without relating this information in any way to a possible line of action. Salomé on the other hand feels the motivation to act, namely to approach Jokanaan: “I would look at him closer” (CW 558). Note that her words change from “will” to “must” as soon as she has initiated the action sequence underlying desire. As soon as the oriented stage of attitude has been arrived at, the body is in suspense until an action is resolved. Salomé’s next two speeches equally end in a crystallization of the wish for direct action. First she wants to touch Jokanaan’s body, then his hair, and finally she wants to kiss his mouth. The monotony of her speeches, “I will kiss thy mouth” and “The head of Jokanaan” repeated several times, appears to me as an almost soothing reassurance on the part of the implied author that Salomé truly knows what she wants and how she can get it. The clarity of her self-awareness gives her a calmness which stands in stark contrast to the emotional restlessness displayed by the tetrarch. Salomé knows that she wants no fruits, no wine, and no rest, so she does not even try to deceive herself. At the same, she does not blame her frustration on anyone else. Jokanaan has caused her problem, he must solve it.

The tetrarch is considered by Worth as “the first of Wilde’s characters to be self-conscious in a thoroughly convincing and interesting way” (62), but – since we are dealing with a drama – this self-consciousness manifests itself in speeches addressed to other people. Herod attempts to be honest about his positive as well as his negative emotions, but most importantly, he seeks to be transparent about his perception of the world, and about how the actions of others affect him. More than any of the other characters, he conveys in his speeches the interplay between himself and his surroundings, between cause and effect. While I cannot agree with Worth that the tetrarch “turns on himself the ‘look’ [the other characters] are fated to turn on each other” (62), it is precisely the existence of the outside world which is highlighted in Herod’s

consciousness. Thus, his manner of speaking is truest to the interpersonal purpose of communication, since it provides others with extensive feedback on their own actions.

The prophet is the character who least afraid to communicate his hostile impulses to others, and – excepting Herodias – no courtier seems to take offence at Jokanaan’s explicitness. On the contrary, this openness enables the other two transparent characters, Herod and Salomé, to develop a differentiated picture of themselves as well as Jokanaan. Herod values him highly, and he excuses the negative mood behind many of his outbursts: “This man comes perchance from God. . . . God has put into his mouth terrible words” (CW 571). Salomé, too, is able to understand the personal anxiety underlying Jokanaan’s religious anger: “Behind thine hands and thy curses thou didst hide thy face” (CW 574). Thus she is able to take his assaults less personal and thus preserve her affiliative attitude towards him: “I saw thee, Jokanaan, and I loved thee” (CW 574).

Ironically, it is also the three most transparent characters who have been subject to the most extensive negative criticism. Jokanaan has been called “fanatical” as a consequence of his outspoken views (Eynat-Confino 128), while Salomé’s sensual longing for Jokanaan has been attempted censured away (see Lewsadder). Herod’s undisguised interest in Salomé is called “lecherous leering” by Austin Quigley, as opposed to the Syrian’s covert “romantic longing” (109). Especially Quigley’s reaction is interesting in this respect, as he explicitly acknowledges that the cast experience the same emotions and desires. From this we must conjure that what finally provokes his criticism is not that the transparent characters *have* these desires – as everyone has them – but precisely that they show them. If the display is taken to be the real problem, this suggests that the surrounding network perceives even communicated intentions as a threat. Yet, if there is one thing that the implied author tries to demonstrate in his play, it is the idea that practical information is at no time harmful to the recipient.

The basic argument against an expression of one’s impulses is that these impulses violate the rights of others. However, the key impulse which is denied any manifestation in *Salomé* is love in its giving form. Apart from paying tribute to another person’s beauty, this form of love makes no more demands. Herodias is allowed to show her devotion by “giving” herself to her lovers, but to the other characters in the play, this “showing” of their impulses is denied even in its most harmless form: looking. The Page admonishes the Syrian not to look at Salomé, “something terrible may happen” (CW 553). The Syrian in turn begs the Princess not to look at Jokanaan, while Herodias admonishes her husband to stop looking at Salomé. Thus, however, they are also effectively prevented from affirming another person’s value. In Wilde’s play, people are better at withholding compliments than at withholding curses.

The first character to be confronted with a blunt display of lust is Salomé, who is subject to the tetrarch's admiring gaze. As far as Herod's "lecherous leering" is concerned, the reader must keep in mind that the tetrarch does not act upon his wish. His "crime" consists in informing Salomé about the impression she makes on him. Salomé herself reacts with outrage and discomfort, which corresponds to the reaction which most critics might expect. Yet, Lewsadder points out the hypocrisy underlying the reaction of the princess: "Symptomatically, Narraboth's fetishization of Salome's [sic] 'dancing' feet belies the threat of Herod's lustful stare, from which *she* tells us she is fleeing" (521). While the princess openly objects to Herod's behaviour, she covertly draws self-esteem from it at the same time. The seductiveness which she uses on the Syrian only moments later, as well as the self-esteem which carries Salomé through her rejection by Jokanaan, is the esteem she has gained from Herod's transparent admiration. Similarly, the prophet's self-esteem receives a boost following Salomé's open display of her admiration, even though he refuses her. Introducing himself to the reader as someone not worthy to unlatch the Saviour's shoes, the undisguised interest exhibited by the princess suddenly turns him into the "chosen of the Lord" (CW 558), while his skinny body reaches new levels of attractiveness: "Back, daughter of Sodom! Touch me not. Profane not the temple of the Lord God" (CW 559). Effectively, such seemingly immoral attitudes have a positive and affiliative social effect, in that they inform other people of their inherent value.

The Syrian's suicide has a very important ethical function in the play, in that it opens up for a text-internal debate about the reasons for his death, or rather his disinclination to go on living. The structural parallelism between the comments by the Page and Herod respectively serves to highlight their content, since both characters claim to have given the Syrian reason enough to live. The Page clamours: "He has slain himself who was my friend" (CW 560). Yet, judging from his speeches during the Syrian's lifetime, the reader gets the suspicion that the Page never told his friend about his affection. All he could bring himself to say were words of complaint, such as a reproach not to gaze at himself in the water, or not to look at Salomé. "I gave him a little box of perfumes and ear-rings wrought in silver and now he killed himself" (CW 560) – this passage makes the Syrian's suicide almost appear like a reaction to the lovelessness of his surroundings. The only offers the Page has to make to his friend are material, and even after his friend's death he has not figured out what he has done wrong. Herod is equally puzzled: "For what reason? I had made him captain" (CW 561). Obviously, however, a person has other needs, and Salomé is the only one who nourishes these needs in the Syrian. Her promise to look at him through her muslin veil, and maybe smile, is all it takes to make him do everything for her. As

much as the Page poses as a victim, there is nothing which prevented him from showing his love for his friend, and the Syrian simply capitulates to the cynical climate around him.

What the characters in Wilde's play are really asked to suppress on a fictional level is a display of their affiliative attitude. Herod's position demonstrates that the alternative can hardly be considered desirable by the implied author: "Your beauty has troubled me. Your beauty has grievously troubled me, and I have looked at you too much. But I will look at you no more. Neither at things nor at people should one look" (CW 571). If the affiliative attitude has to be suppressed in order not to offend anyone, something is seriously wrong in any social network. Salomé is in the peculiar situation that her loving feelings are so unwanted by Jokanaan that he not only commands her not to address him, but that he also tries to eliminate every loving feeling in her, as if he felt disconcerted by the very thought that she desires him. Yet, as Shakespeare says in his famous sonnet, "Love is not love/ Which alters when it alteration finds,/ Or bends with the remover to remove" (116.2-4). This is of course the implied author's message throughout the play, but to convey this form of love as present in Salomé, he has to allow her to express it. After all, the reader cannot look into her mind, so he – like the fictional characters – has only the level of communication to go by. Had Salomé ceased to bother Jokanaan and remained silent, the reader might easily have felt that her love ceases with her speech, thus unknowingly contributing to the climate of disinterestedness. Yet, the implied author ultimately supports the right of his characters to express their intentions, regardless whether they are granted an outlet or not. As long as Salomé proclaims that she will kiss Jokanaan's mouth, she signals that he is worth kissing. Therefore, I take Salomé's insistence as a fight for her right to *show* her love, rather than a craving to receive affection, signalled by the wording "I will kiss thy mouth" rather than "Kiss me." It is her affiliative attitude which can neither be suppressed by the prophet's insults, nor by Herod's intervention, nor by Jokanaan's death, nor by the Apocalypse. Jokanaan's value is higher than that she will let any obstacle prevent her from affirming it: "There is nothing in the world so red as thy mouth. . . . Let me kiss thy mouth" (CW 559; ellipsis in original).

The importance of transparency is structurally reinforced by means of the recurring veil imagery. Once again, the implied author attempts to justify his own ethical propositions by reference to external Biblical evidence. In the Old Testament, the veil separated the innermost part of the Jewish sanctuary from the area of the laymen, who were considered unfit to understand the essence of religious teaching (e.g. Leviticus 16:2). The New Testament, on the other hand, seeks to remove this symbolic "veil" in order to make religious understanding accessible to everyone (2 Corinthians 3). In *Salomé*, the implied author changes the context of the veil metaphor in order to use it to promote his own ideas on transparency. Ironically, it is Herod

who is accused of having stolen this veil from the sanctuary, and he is one of the characters who can be credited for establishing transparency within the fictional setting. Since the removal of the Biblical veil is done for the sake of the recipient, transparency in *Salomé* should be seen in the same light, as the implied author tries to emphasise the social benefits which arise from the individual's unwillingness to hide impulses and motivations. Jokanaan's prophesy of open eyes and ears sets the structural development towards greater development in motion. Yet, once it concerns him personally, the prophet is no longer so enthusiastic about Salomé's practised transparency. "Touch me not. Profane not the temple of the Lord God" (CW 559), he clamours when the princess asks for permission to touch his hair. When Salomé later counters Herod's offer "I will give thee the veil of the sanctuary" with a reaffirming request "Give me the head of Jokanaan" (CW 573), the implied author suggests a direct link between physical experience and a practical understanding of the whole spectrum of human emotions. Thus, he practically excuses Salomé's intention to slay and kiss Jokanaan by referring to the human need to "look behind the veil" as far as religious wisdom is concerned.

The Extent of Action Resolution

It goes without saying that a philosophy which seems to advocate direct action resolution sooner or later must deal with the problem of "acting-out". This line of behaviour, defined as "giving in to your impulses without any reflection about their meaning or their consequences, so that you don't suffer any conflict or frustration" (Skynner, *Life* 55), is considered as one of the immature defence mechanisms in Vaillant's study, and thus a sign of poor mental health. This idea is very important for the discussion of transparency in *Salomé*, since Wilde's characters have been accused of inconsiderateness by various critics (e.g. Donohue, "Symbolist" 98). As I will try to show in the following section, these accusations are unfounded.

I must emphasize that the Attitude Theory does not advocate the consummation of unpremeditated action, disregarding the consequences for other people. Unfortunately, Wilde's theory does not expand on this aspect, at least not in *The Picture in Dorian Gray*. Bull on her part emphasizes what a great role thinking plays in the resolution of incompatible actions:

Since mental disorder begins with conflicting motor attitudes which produce confusion and inability to function, it is both important and encouraging to bear in mind that *thinking* has originated in the self-same manner. . . / . . . The complex of attitudes represents a serious problem for the individual since none of the proposed courses of action is satisfactory, and thinking or consideration is initiated by the sheer necessity of finding a solution. According to the present point of view, thought has its beginning and ending in behavior. Born of an action-complex of involuntary motor attitudes, it heads toward further action in the form of voluntary resolution. (11)

Bull's idea is intriguing for an analysis of action on a fictional as well as structural level in literature. First of all, thinking (or communication) can result in a voluntary abandonment of one's intended course of action. As far as the implied author's structural course of action is concerned, there has to be some resolution of action in a healthy work of art, but this resolution should ideally be accepted by all the respective parties on a fictional level. A critical evaluation of fictional action resolution therefore involves the question to what extent opposite viewpoints and consequences are considered by an individual, and to what extent the implied author makes such opposite viewpoints and consequences available to his characters.

The character of Herod makes an ambiguous remark which has been misunderstood by many critics: "How red those petals are! They are like stains of blood on the cloth. That does not matter. You must not find symbols in everything you see. It makes life impossible. It were better to say that stains of blood are as lovely as rose petals. It were far better to say that. . . . But we will not speak of this" (CW 568; ellipsis in original). With this comment, the tetrarch reveals himself not as a bloodthirsty sadist, as Bird has suggested (73), but as a naturally considerate man. Herod's great problem is that he *does* see symbols, i.e. possible negative consequences of his actions, and since he *cannot* find beauty in inconsiderate actions unlike many other rulers, his life does become impossible. The play's conflict between symbolist and realist modes of perception reflects the conflict between "impractical" consideration and "pragmatic" acting out. Of course, symbolist inference can also mean "mind-reading everybody else and getting it wrong" (Skynner, *Life* 28), which seems to be the queen's primary argument against inference: "[T]he moon is like the moon, that is all" (CW 561).

Yet, while the queen refuses to consider anything she cannot immediately see, she does not allow the other characters to *show* either, a fact which becomes even more obvious in the original French version of *Salomé*. Here, Herod compares the moon to "une femme hystérique" looking everywhere for lovers (39), a subtle allusion to the queen's hypocritical display of jealousy despite her own promiscuity. For a woman who pretends not to understand allusions, Herodias' answer is conspicuous: "*No*; the moon is like the moon, that is all. Let us go within. . . . *You have nothing to do here*" (CW 561; ellipsis in original, my emphasis). It is not so much that the queen is unable to see different viewpoints; she simply refuses to consider any objections to her own intended course of action, and she refuses to be reminded that there might be any. This, of course, makes it easy for Herodias to get through life without a bad conscience. Opposed to this lack of consideration, Herod's hesitant superstition is a sign of health rather than a weakness.

Salomé is regarded as the epitome of transparency, and most critics take her to be as inconsiderate as her mother. According to Gilbert, her "strength derives from a wholly apolitical

self-indulgence, a total lack of concern for process and consequences” (152). Yet, if we look at Salomé’s speeches to Jokanaan, we see that they reflect a straightforward thinking process as outlined by Bull, revealing both her motivation and her considerations. To start with, her clear formulation “I will kiss thy mouth” (*CW* 559) signals that it is love and not anger which makes her pursue her course of action, and that this love is not a demand for requited affection but the plea to show her own desire. Salomé’s stream of consciousness can only be interpreted along these lines, as there is no evidence of any other motivation in her words or actions. On the contrary, her anger is immediately dispersed in quickly communicated destructive fantasies, which helps her recover her original affectionate impulse underlying her momentary frustration: “Thy body is hideous. It is like the body of a leper. . . . It is horrible, thy body is horrible. It is of thy hair that I am enamored, Jokanaan” (*CW* 559). What remains is always the young man’s beauty, and the counterarguments she invokes and dismisses in her speeches are related to her desire to affirm this beauty. Salomé alludes to “the red blasts of trumpets, that herald the approach of kings, and make afraid the enemy” as well as “the [red] feet of him who cometh from a forest where he hath slain a lion” (*CW* 559), signalling her fearlessness of Herod, who is soon to enter the stage. She is also unafraid of Jokanaan’s possible wrath in the name of the Lord, symbolised by “the feet of those who tread the wine in the wine-press” (*CW* 559). In addition, Salomé considers the moment following the prophet’s execution: “The long black nights, when the moon hides her face, when the stars are afraid, are not so black. The silence that dwells in the forest is not so black. There is nothing in the world so black as thy hair. . . . Let me touch thy hair” (*CW* 559).

All of these images reflect the consequences of Salomé’s actions with respect to her own situation, which is the only perspective she can be certain about. Yet, to let his protagonist become acquainted with opposing interests, the implied author engages her in conversation with the two characters who will be most affected by Salomé’s later action, namely Jokanaan and Herod. It is their responsibility to inform the princess about their subjective perspective if they intend to give her a reason to alter her course. Although Salomé is asked to consider their objections, there is no guarantee that she will eventually consider them more important than her own interests. Jokanaan and Herod can influence the outcome of these negotiations by arguing well. In this context, Nissen’s observation that an implied author’s ethical sympathies often determine who is given “all the good lines” in a fictional discussion (278) becomes highly relevant. In the conversations between Salomé and Jokanaan as well as Salomé and Herod, the implied author indeed attempts to manipulate the reader’s sympathies by structurally weakening Jokanaan’s and Herod’s argumentative positions. At the same time, these characters are made

wholly responsible for their own situation, since they are given the opportunity to speak even if they do not take it. One could say that Salomé's later decision to ask Herod for Jokanaan's head is made easier for her given the fact that neither man can come up with a proper argument why she should not. Jokanaan does not present himself as much interested in life, so Salomé is never made to think about what losing his life means for him. Indeed, her speech seems to allude to his pose as a false messiah, almost waiting to sacrifice himself: "Thy hair is horrible. It is covered with mire and dust. It is like a crown of thorns which they have placed on thy forehead" (CW 559). Salomé's refusal to accept Jokanaan's no for an answer is thus presented as a result of pondering, rather than outright disregard.

Especially Herod has a weaker stand in his conversations with Salomé than elsewhere in the play. The implied author lets her display as much consideration as possible to convey to the reader that the tetrarch's responsibility in the execution of Jokanaan. Salomé's request that Herod should swear an oath preceding her dance is almost ritualistic:

SALOMÉ: You swear it, Tetrarch?

HEROD: I swear it, Salomé.

...

SALOMÉ: By what will you swear, Tetrarch?

HEROD: By my life, by my crown, by my gods. Whatsoever you desire I will give it you, even to the half of my kingdom, if you will but dance for me. O, Salomé, Salomé, dance for me!

SALOMÉ: You have sworn, Tetrarch.

HEROD: I have sworn, Salomé. (CW 568)

It might not even require "proper sympathy" (Gilbert 144) to side with Salomé in this situation. Herod presents the option of a dance as everything his heart desires, something that will make him completely happy, and in return he is willing to give the princess everything *she* desires. In fact, it is the tetrarch who links Salomé's later request to desire rather than revenge. The princess is practically offered a genuinely affiliative gift, rather than stealing something from Herod.

Their next conversation is also ethically charged. To take the maliciousness out of Salomé's request, the implied author first lets her kneel down as she starts her speech. Halfway through it, she is interrupted by a "*laughing*" and noticeably patronising tetrarch, who treats her like the damsel in the Gospels, upon which she is "*rising*" to complete her request (CW 570). Herod now presents several objections to Salomé, including the idea that Jokanaan's anger might be part of God's larger benevolent scheme, and that the tetrarch himself would suffer from the loss. Yet, these objections are formulated in such symbolic language that they could equally well be used to justify Salomé's own line of action. Herod's true concerns, namely that he is fond of the prophet and that he would lose his conscience along with Jokanaan, are not mentioned when it matters most. In addition, the tetrarch's alternative material offers are more and more juxtaposed

to Salomé's wish for a "human" experience. It is important to note that Herod does not try to obstruct her quest for transparency and self-awareness in any way. Especially the offers in his last speech seem to encourage her endeavour to gain knowledge. What the tetrarch never understands, however, is that – for him as well as others – truly important knowledge only can be gained through interaction with others.

Only one objection is not quite clear to Salomé as she plans her course of action, and that is "the permanence of death" (Knox 234). It is impossible for her – as for any other character at Herod's court – to experience the reality behind the fantasy of "wishing someone dead." Apparently, the distancing from the act of ending someone's life, by means of an order carried out by others or by means of fantasy, makes the whole affair appear less real. Another person's life is treated lightly as long as one does not have to take it oneself, or witness what one is doing. It is one thing to say "I wish to kill you" but quite another to actually do it. Of course, this recognition is equally true with respect to everyday fantasy and literary creation. Nissen cautions that actions which are realised on a fictional level are nothing but language as far as the implied author is concerned (266), i.e. they remain on a level of intention. In *Salomé*, therefore, the execution of the prophet upon Salomé's command functions as a cathartic moment on a fictional as well as structural level, in that it demonstrates what killing really means, and what difference a person's death makes to the whole network. The implied author tries to make clear once and for all – to his fictional characters, to his readers, and to himself – that the wish to kill is not the correct motor impulse underlying an angry attitude. Moreover, the life of a person who is not useful to oneself is not therefore meaningless as such. By terminating the life of the man she loves, Salomé ends up as the casualty of her own action, and her first realisation is that having Jokanaan dead is not as good as having him alive.

It is worth noticing that it is obviously impossible for anyone at Herod's court to go out and wilfully kill someone unless he is wearing an ominous "death-ring." The Cappadocian's remark seems to suggest that it would be a natural reaction for any person to be afraid of having to kill someone (CW 554), and the Executioner only managed to strangle the first king after having receiving the death-ring from the tetrarch. Thus, says the Second Soldier, "he was not afraid" (CW 554). Just like the affiliative attitude on a general level, the reluctance to kill is presented as the basic state of mind of any human being, unless it is removed by artificial means. Herod, who is said to have waded deep enough in blood, wears the death-ring constantly, or else he could not do it. Obviously, the Tetrarch's sending the ring to the Executioner is also a sign of respect and sympathy for this reluctance, so as to spare him from an otherwise dreadful

experience. Here, too, we find an instance of an individual's affiliative attitude showing itself even within an overall violent context.

The play's structural ethos is concerned with conveying a feeling to the reader, not an opinion. The implied author does not attempt to teach the reader to object to murder on a theoretical level. Instead, he allows the cast's deep-rooted and conscious unwillingness to kill to spread itself to the reader as a conscious awareness of his own reluctance. In order to achieve this, the implied author has arranged the execution of Jokanaan with great care, making the moment appear frightfully real. He tries to portray killing as so saddening and uncomfortable and so much in discord with any basic human inclination that the reader wants this execution of the prophet as little as any of the fictional characters involved in the act. The question is not one of rational disapproval, but of genuine sadness and reluctance. The prophet has been portrayed as a hostile, intolerant and narrow-minded person, and yet the aim of the scene is to make the reader cherish Jokanaan's life once he is in danger of losing it.

The preparation of reluctance begins with Herod's second speech to Salomé, when he excuses the prophet's insulting behaviour: "God has put into his mouth terrible words. In the palace as in the desert God is always with him. . . . At least it is possible. One does not know. It is possible that God is for him and with him" (CW 571-72; ellipsis in original). For the first time, the reader is given an independent opinion that Jokanaan might not mean to be offensive, and that it is not necessary to directly hate him. The final execution (CW 573) is rich in stage directions reflecting the implied author's ethos, almost turning the scene into a narrative passage. This passage serves to show the number of people who are eventually involved in an act which Salomé originally desired for her own pleasure. The death-ring is taken from the tetrarch and given to the Executioner, who "*looks scared*" as he is approached. Although Jokanaan is hidden from view, the experience of the execution is dragged into the light by Salomé herself. She recreates the dread of a victim at the moment of death ("Ah! if any man sought to kill me, I would cry out, I would struggle, I would not suffer"), the strike, and the sound of something falling. Salomé's suggestion that "there are not dead men enough" and her attempt to involve the Page and the Soldiers in her scheme makes them "*recoil.*" Herod has to witness the execution without the death-ring on his hand, and he "*hides his face with his cloak*" upon seeing the prophet's head. The dimension of the subjective sense of loss is deepened in the stage direction concerning Jokanaan's followers: "*The NAZARENES fall on their knees and begin to pray.*" Curiously, it is Salomé herself who contributes most to conveying a subjective feeling of reluctance to the reader. All she needs to get rid of her fit of aggression is the communication of the impulse to "strike" (CW 573). As soon as she has discovered the exact motor attitude underlying her anger and

converts this impulse into a fantasy, the feeling subsides. As she proclaims to be waiting for Jokanaan's death-cry, she is actually imagining two scenarios of the execution *not* being carried out. Underneath the surface of fury and anger, the princess displays herself a natural reluctance to take someone else's life.

The fact that the act of having Jokanaan executed has not made Salomé's anger subside is further proof that the demand for his execution is obviously not an adequate outlet for her aggressive impulse. The physical action must be performed by Salomé herself if it is to grant her any relief, and eventually this anger turns out to be moderate. The princess derives complete satisfaction from the simple act of biting her beloved in the very act of kissing him. Thus, her motor impulse is as little dangerous as that of Jokanaan, whose original level of aggression would have found a sufficient consummation in the harmless action of hitting Herodias with a fan (*CW* 558). The queen's anger finds a similar outlet as she strikes her own page with a fan (*CW* 565). Ironically, there is no stage direction which confirms that the long-desired kiss actually takes place. Salomé motivation is only presented to the reader as descriptive communicated intention, which stresses the expressive aspect in any action sequence. It is less important for the princess to actually perform the kiss than to tell Jokanaan what she thinks of him. This self-revelation for the sake of the whole network is the main aim of Wilde's promotion of transparency, rather than the pursuit of action in itself.

After having demonstrated to the reader as well as his fictional characters that killing someone else is not a good thing, what is the implied author thinking when he lets his ethical argument be followed by yet another execution, wholly unannounced and placed directly before the fall of the final curtain? It is here we have to consider the second level of discourse, between author and reader. As Bull has pointed out, thinking is supposed to result in a resolution of competing attitudes. As far as the fictional level is concerned, this resolution must be achieved by giving greater weight to one line of thought and less weight to another. In *Salomé*, the implied author gives the interests of his protagonist precedence over the interests of Jokanaan or Herod, and allows for a consummative action in the form of the kiss she has desired. That Salomé's method of achieving satisfaction consists in denying her opponent the right to raise further objections is reflected in her final speech to the head: "Well, Jokanaan, I still live, but thou, thou art dead, and thy head belongs to me. I can do with it what I will" (*CW* 574). Herod, too, killed his opponents in order to remove any objections to his point of view, and he is visibly scared by the prospect that Christ might bring back the dead.

Nevertheless, the implied author is well aware that Salomé's interests are not objectively more important than those of either Herod or Jokanaan, and he has no intention to suggest to the

reader that they are. Had the plot sought to reflect the equality of all three positions, no action would have been possible, according to Bakhtin (17). Wilde, on the other hand, opts for another alternative. The imaginary plane of art allows him to resolve the conflict of conflicting attitudes in a way which is not possible in real life: the implied author realises *all three* motor impulses in action! For his finale, Jokanaan is brought back from the dead, to complete his wish for Salomé's execution. The prophet's dominant motivation is to have Salomé dead, while her motivation is to kiss his mouth after having him decapitated. In a linear and realistic plot, one would have to die first, thus giving up his claim. In Wilde's fictional world, however, death is mysteriously non-permanent, which allows both characters to have their way, and to accept a possible counter-attack. Jokanaan's unresponsiveness to his own execution becomes less strange in the light of the fact that he will have his main wish satisfied at the end of the play. Similarly, Salomé's unconcern about her own violent death is understandable now that her own wish has been fulfilled.

As revolting as the scene might appear to the reader, it is worth noticing that neither Herod nor Jokanaan is presented as completely involved in this act. For the reader, Herod's aggressive impulse exhausts itself on an intentional level, the command "Kill that woman" (CW 575). This is the strength of his aggression, and here ends his involvement in another person's death, true to his nature. To me at least, the tetrarch does not become any less sympathetic for having this violent fantasy in the face of Salomé's bliss, highlighted by the reappearance of the moon. The final stage direction is instead dominated by the imaginary presence of Jokanaan, whose earlier fantasy about Salomé's death is stylistically re-enacted. Yet, the prophet is not physically present since he is obviously dead. His involvement in the killing is thus presented as strangely unreal. With respect to Herod and Jokanaan, the execution of Salomé remains a communicated fantasy, which is thus to the very last presented as the optimal outlet for negative impulses.

Chapter 4: Facing the Dysfunctional Environment

An essential feature of exceptional mental health is the belief in some sort of transcendent value system. Very healthy people experience an almost spiritual connectedness to other human beings and the universe at large, which diminishes the importance of their own immediate concerns in comparison with larger issues for the benefit of mankind (Skynner, *Life* 34-35, 290 ff.). If we take the idea of mental health in itself as such a set of transcendental values, as Oscar Wilde indeed does, we might expect healthy individuals to have an urge to spread the good news within their larger, less healthy social network. In Wilde's case, as I have tried to argue, his main aim as a writer was the promotion of the "true personality of man."

Yet, any such endeavour must be reconciled with two caveats in connection with the idea of exceptional mental health, which expose a certain paradox underlying the very concept. First of all, according to Skynner, there is a reason why the world is not irresistibly drawn towards self-perfection. As it happens, every level of health has its own built-in value-system, which involuntarily regards all other levels, including optimal health, as inferior (*Life* 64). This is how people with average health evaluate the unrestrained behaviour exhibited by exceptionally healthy individuals:

I think we'd find their openness and warmth rather odd at first, and might start wondering, 'What are they up to? What are they hoping to get out of this?' And we'd probably imagine that they are rather naïve, and feel a bit sorry for them because they might be easily conned. At any rate we'd be likely to think they were taking rather foolish risks, being too trusting, not protecting their own interests enough. But then, we'd almost certainly see their emotional independence and capacity for separateness as a lack of caring, as rather selfish, and as a sign of not being really involved and loving. . . . We'd almost certainly feel that the 'healthies' discussed some things that were better not talked about, or at least were tactless or insensitive, in the way that they were able to voice their negative feelings. And we'd certainly find the lively 'three-ring-circus' atmosphere too chaotic and disorderly and worry that things would get out of control, or that they were out of control already! And we'd probably feel that some of their views on life were rather harsh and bleak, that they showed a tough and very unromantic attitude towards illusions that we value highly. We'd also be confused and critical that the 'healthies' handle change so well, because in mid-range families it's a great compliment to be told, 'You've never changed,' or 'You're just the same person you've always been.' (*Life* 67)

The fact that the critical reception of *Salomé* reflects exactly this ethical position proves in an ironic way how exceptionally healthy Wilde's play actually is.

Cleese raises an interesting objection to Skynner's résumé, which brings us to the first obstacle to any mission in the name of exceptional mental health. "Well, here's a paradox," he argues, "If mid-range people, who after all form the bulk of the population, feel this way, then the healthies should be unpopular! Yet you said they get on strikingly well with their neighbours"

(*Life* 67). The reason why this is the case, counters Skynner, is that “they’d be sufficiently sensitive and considerate about the feelings of others to fit their behaviour to the company they’re in . . . rather than push their philosophy of life down other people’s throats” (*Life* 68). This is of course a paradoxical situation. Cleese’s paradox is of some importance with respect to writers like Wilde, who proclaims in “The Soul of Man under Socialism” that “no class is ever conscious of their own suffering” and that they consequently “have to be told of it by other people” (*CW* 1082). Apparently, those who use the publicly accessible medium of literature to spread ideas of healthy behaviour will invariably be unpopular. While literature allows them to reach a greater number of people than they could reach by means of personal encounter, they cannot control who will end up in their literary company, so they unwittingly offend people who are uncomfortable with outspoken views.

As a supporter of health, Wilde finds himself in a difficult situation. How can an exceptionally healthy author address an indefinite readership at all, without compromising his own principles of health on a formal level for fear of offending someone he wants to help? The result would be a lower level of health than the author is capable of. Besides, how can he encourage his reader to strive towards exceptional health if he is not allowed to outline on a fictional level what healthy behaviour is supposed to consist in? Concerned only with closed networks, Skynner’s caveat does not address the situation of an already healthy individual who seeks to establish his own network with people who are equally healthy. John Cleese makes the sarcastic remark: “So to sum up, you’re saying that the best way to achieve a high degree of mental health is to be born into a very healthy family. . . . Well, that’s most helpful. It’s as simple as that. You should write a ‘Teach Yourself’ book about it” (*Life* 69). Yet, if a healthy individual should be lacking an independent network of healthy companions, and only has the dysfunctional world at large at his disposal, it is a little more difficult to keep one’s unpopular traits of exceptional mental health to oneself. Adjusting one’s behaviour to a less healthy environment means in this case putting on a mask *all the time*, unless one decides to retreat from the society of others altogether. That again would be a violation of the affiliative attitude.

What might sound like an absurd scenario to Skynner is nevertheless characteristic of Wilde’s fictional universe and the “healthy” writing situation itself. Here we find no closed healthy groups; there is only the individual with healthy intentions, and a less healthy surrounding network. Somebody *has* to be inconvenienced in order to make life agreeable for the other part. In the following, I will discuss the fictional and structural ethos in *Salomé* in the light of transcendental values. Does mankind benefit from a value system which invariably will bring the individual in conflict with his environment? Is personal inconvenience a reasonable price to

pay in the name of exceptional health? Finally, is the possibility of exceptional mental health of greater importance than the individual concerns of a less healthy opponent to the idea? How far can a promotion of health go without being inconsiderate of the limitations of others?

Living in the Name of Transparency

Salomé is a tragedy for the very reason that the fictional characters striving for greater health only have a slightly dysfunctional network at their disposal. Unless they live in constant self-denial, they are in one way or another bound to end up in conflict with their environment. Within the limits of the fictional setting, it is predominantly the presence of the prophet Jokanaan that puts the other characters' affiliative attitude to the test. Yet as the story unfolds, the solution which both Herod and Salomé choose is to realise their own idea of exceptional mental health – whatever the cost. As Lord Henry puts it in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, “[t]o be good is to be in harmony with one’s self” (CW 69). After all, he says, “[w]hen we are happy we are always good, but when we are good we are not always happy” (CW 69).

In *Salomé*, the protagonist's explicit ethical proposition that “the mystery of love is greater than the mystery of death” (CW 574) is pointing back to the play's starting point. The average, slightly hostile and sceptical attitude towards others is regarded as spiritual “death” in Wilde's play, and one should think that everything is better than death. Most people barricade themselves against their fellow human beings behind an arsenal of defences, precisely in order to prevent themselves from becoming hurt or offended. Yet where there is so much caution against hostility, love cannot enter either. In contrast to this, the form of health which is desired by Herod and Salomé is an affiliative spirit combined with greatest possible transparency in perception as well as action. They want to keep their eyes and ears open to impressions which they hope will be beautiful only. In addition, they want to “show themselves naked” in that they want to find expression for all of their impulses, which also they expect to be beautiful only. They intend to encounter the world completely defenceless, unable to imagine how anyone could take offence in their desires, or even be willing to hurt them.

Skygger would call this attitude one-sided and optimistic rather than realistic (*Life* 6), but his suggestion basically encourages an individual to be less healthy than he is capable of – which, in the case of Wilde's fictional universe, would be *all the time*. For such an attitude to be adaptive, it is therefore important that the individual's friendly initiative is not rewarded with malice. The disadvantage of being defenceless in expectation of positive feedback is that one is equally defenceless against negative feedback. In Wilde's fictional universe, where there are no closed healthy networks, affiliative openness can make an isolated individual extremely

vulnerable to crisis. As a consequence, a person opening up in order to become healthier might end up feeling even worse. These dramatic personal consequences of a conflict with society are another form of “death,” and *Salomé* gives us ample examples of good love gone bad. In “The Soul of Man under Socialism,” Wilde laments:

What I mean by a perfect man is one who develops under perfect conditions; one who is not wounded, or worried, or maimed, or in danger. Most personalities have been obliged to be rebels. Half their strength has been wasted in friction. . . . Such battles do not always intensify strength; they often exaggerate weakness. . . . The note of the perfect personality is not rebellion, but peace. (*CW* 1084; my ellipsis)

Yet in *Salomé*, as probably in real life, it is impossible to change one’s behaviour half-way into an episode that has already begun. One cannot choose only the practical aspects of transparency and stay clear of the risks. A character choosing to be transparent has to take the risk that things will go wrong, or else leave the project altogether. The choice that is made is thus categorical. In order to help the reader make up his mind, the implied author outlines the consequences of each course of action.

The queen has already given in to external pressure. Since her way of sexual self-expression has provoked a series of insults coming from the repressive prophet, she has taken on a hostile and defensive position. Although Jokanaan is on his own in criticising Herodias, he does damage enough to her affiliative attitude, and the hate which his insults produce in her sets the tone for her subsequent attitude towards others. Rather than proudly owning up to her former affairs, the queen now almost disowns them, by avoiding the topic and by trying to silence critical voices. The situation has made her become almost paranoid, even taking personally those verbal assaults by Jokanaan which are actually addressed to her daughter. Her refusal to look at the moon and her disregard for things you cannot see points to a reinstatement of defences, and her situation makes all too clear why Wilde chose to describe her character in a letter as “reason in its tragic raiment” (qtd. in Stokes 35). Herodias is clearly forced into her defensive role due to constant conflict with her environment. That her hostile attitude is not her basic state of mind becomes obvious in the change which occurs in her after the prophet’s execution. All of a sudden, she can publicly acknowledge her own sexuality by approving of her daughter’s undisguised amorous pursuit, even if this provokes her husband’s anger (“There speaks the incestuous wife” [*CW* 574]), and she decides to stay in the fresh air on the terrace.

That *Salomé* chooses to define love as a “mystery” points to the ambiguity underlying the transparent approach to life. Both Herod and *Salomé* experience their worst nightmares in the name of love, and those who are shocked by the characters’ violent reactions have certainly never allowed themselves to become equally exposed and vulnerable. *Salomé* is brave enough to openly

declare her love to Jokanaan, and kindly asks him for permission to touch his body and hair, and to kiss his mouth. The white imagery of her first incantation reflects the innocence and positive feelings she assigns to her request, and it must come as an enormous shock to the princess as much as anyone else to see these intentions misconstrued as signs of whoredom and perversion. What makes her situation even more deplorable is that she has to see herself developing uncontrollable feelings of revenge, which turn her into a person just the opposite of whom she had intended to become. Starting out from a mentally sterile, but socially acceptable state of “innocence,” Salomé allows herself to become completely vulnerable, in order to demonstrate that an unconditionally affiliative attitude pays off in social interaction. Contrary to what she has expected, her beloved – basing his conduct on an entirely different value system – uses exactly this lack of defensiveness to hurt her. Totally unprepared for the impact of this humiliation, the princess can see her own health deteriorate before her very eyes. If her behaviour was at least no worse than average at the beginning of the play, it is clearly dysfunctional around the time of Jokanaan’s execution. By provoking Salomé into this outraged reaction, the play’s repressive forces – represented by the prophet – have indeed proven that her philosophy of life is inferior to current standard.

The play’s structure makes it obvious that it is the wider social network and not the healthy individual which acts as an aggressor. In *Salomé*, it is primarily Herod who is a victim of his non-affiliative surroundings. His strong sense of values, in itself a sign of exceptional mental health (Skynner, *Life* 31), does not find a counterpart in others: “And I have never broken my word. I am not of those who break their oaths. I know not how to lie. I am the slave of my word, and my word is the word of a king. The King of Cappadocia always lies, but he is no true king. He is a coward” (CW 569). It is his own integrity which makes it difficult for Herod to get by. The tetrarch’s affiliative attitude is repaid with ridicule and exploitation, provoking him into violent moods. The political reality of the play does not allow for an affiliative but weak kingship. Judea seems to be on the brink of a Roman occupation, a fact which can be easily concealed from a naïve tetrarch who likes to think positively about his heroes: “But Cæsar is not coming into Judæa. Only yesterday I received letters from Rome. They contained nothing concerning this matter” (CW 564). Herod is no Machiavelli, but a Machiavelli is needed in order to survive in politics. This need for toughness compromises any attempt to display an affiliative attitude in all areas of life, and the play clearly portrays this fact as regrettable: Wilde’s presentation puts the source of evil outside the fictional world of Herod’s court. At various points in the play, Herod is juxtaposed to Machiavellian kings who display clearly unsympathetic behaviour. Those that break the rules are too far removed from the “good” individuals to be

inspired and changed. The implied author does not challenge the idea of affiliative behaviour in the political arena, but rather presents it as regrettable that trustful people are exploited.

Similarly, Herod's honesty about his affection for his brother's daughter leads to constant criticism from his wife until he becomes weary of her. When the tetrarch finally turns to Salomé in his sorrow, asking her to dance for him because he is sad (CW 568), he has no reason to expect any malice coming from her. So far, the princess has appeared to him as the only person not corrupted by the harshness of the world around them, and it is not surprising that he sees hope for himself in a possible union. However, without any warning or explanation, she of all people uses his oath against him, humiliates him in public, and has his precious prophet killed. The implied author preserves the validity of the tetrarch's subjective feeling of being wronged by not having Salomé explain her true motives. The reader must share Herod's belief that he is punished for his openness. The tetrarch does not even question Salomé's undisclosed motives, which signals his respect for other people's right to make their own decisions. His refusal to control other people's actions allows them to use his own integrity against him. The implied author shares Herod's disappointment and he is careful in his description of the tetrarch's body language during the execution of the prophet. Stage directions describing Herod as "*sinking back in his seat*" and "*hid[ing] his face with his cloak*" (CW 573) convey a sense of pity with his character, rather than glee. Even so, no disillusionment truly abolishes the tetrarch's honest and decent intentions towards his surroundings. Instead, he is left with ambiguous feelings: "Ah! Wherefore did I give my oath? Kings ought never to pledge their word. If they keep it not, it is terrible, and if they keep it, it is terrible also" (CW 573).

It is all the more tragic to see how Herod and Salomé, who both have the greatest potential for health in that they show an interest in transcendental values, are virtually played off against each other by the play's repressive forces represented by the prophet and the now disillusioned queen. This might not even have been intentional, but as the two most deliberately vulnerable characters, the tetrarch and the princess are naturally susceptible to such ploys. In their ill-fated dialogic encounters, both appear more like victims of the play's developments, rather than antagonists, and it is important to note the courtesy in their conversation. While Herod is nothing but friendly in his unsuccessful entreaties, Salomé's replies are short, polite and firm, but never hostile. Salomé's dance for the tetrarch functions as the symbol of their defeat and degradation in the name of love. The dance is also the swan song for their health project, and in a way, this is their closest moment. Salomé has already been called a harlot by the man she has had the courage to proclaim her love to, so why should it matter now whether or not she dances for the pleasure of her mother's husband, who has been lusting for her all the while? At the same

time, her degradation forces Salomé to become cruel; her dance takes place in her full awareness that she is abusing the tetrarch's trust in her. Yet, underlying Salomé's compliance is also an element of closeness and comfort. She can relate to Herod's desire for a kiss (disguised as an offer of food and wine); after all, she longs for the same. In addition, Salomé agrees to the dance following Herod's transparent confession that he is sad. By giving in to his entreaty, she thus offers him a sort of advance consolation for the pain she will invariably inflict on him only moments later. With Salomé's dance, the play reaches the point where the forces aiming for greater transparency in the name of health are forced to turn against each other instead of changing society. Some critics might see this as a victory of common taste over transgressing behaviour, and take it as the moral message of the play. From a perspective of exceptional mental health, however, I see Herod's and Salomé's interaction as an example of the implied author's sense of tragedy.

With her obsessive desire for Jokanaan's head on a silver platter, Salomé demonstrates that the healthy philosophy underlying her original plan of action under present conditions has turned her into a menace to society. She has demonstrated that she is capable of killing someone she loves, and exploit someone who trusted her. Her final monologue reflects her puzzlement about how things managed to take such a turn and get out of control: "It is strange, is it not? How is it that the red viper stirs no longer . . . What shall I do now, Jokanaan? Neither the floods nor the great waters can quench my passion. I was a princess, and thou didst scorn me. I was a virgin, and thou didst take my virginity from me. I was chaste, and thou didst fill my veins with fire" (CW 574). With Jokanaan's execution, both Herod and Salomé have witnessed the positive and negative consequences of their attempt to approach the world with love. The only chance Salomé might have had to avoid the violent end of the affair would have been not to expose herself to men in the first place, be it Herod or the prophet, and thus to remain "dead." The same holds true for the tetrarch. Had he not exposed himself to the world, he would have been spared loss and disappointment. What remains to be answered in either case is if such self-renunciation might not have been better for everyone concerned.

Herod proposes a complete withdrawal from the public sphere as the best solution on a fictional level: "I have looked at you too much. But I will look at you no more. Neither at things, nor at people should one look" (CW 571). Richard Ellmann takes this to be the implied author's position, and he might not be far from the truth: "Herod too passes on, strong in his tremblings, a leaf but a sinuous one, swept but not destroyed by successive waves of spiritual and physical passion . . . Here too there is martyrdom and abandonment, with a legal right to choose and yet stay aloof" (35). The tetrarch does not really withdraw from society out of fear, but in regret and

in self-defence, to protect the remains of goodness that are left in him. He chooses not to be maimed any further, but he chooses life. How serious this problem is for Wilde is further demonstrated by the fact that Herod's philosophy echoes the attitude of Basil Hallward in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and that it reappears in the words of Lord Goring, who says in *An Ideal Husband*: "Other people are quite dreadful. The only possible society is oneself" (CW 522). The other alternative would be to remain on a friendly terms with people in general, while abstaining from deeper emotional engagement. This is the fate of Lord Henry in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, for which he is eventually criticised by his friend Basil: "You like every one; that is to say, you are indifferent to every one" (CW 23).

Salomé's conclusion is unequivocal. Rather than remaining spiritually dead, she is willing to engage in human encounter – even at the risk of being hurt. "[T]he mystery of love is greater than the mystery of death. Love only should one consider" (CW 574). There is only one drawback to her policy, which – admittedly – the implied author never quite resolves. Salomé seeks the company of others in order to create a network of her own. Yet, in Wilde's fictional universe, these friends have to be found among less healthy people, which will necessarily result in a confrontation with different value systems. When she falls in love with the prophet, the princess finds herself in a difficult situation. On the one hand, she discovers Jokanaan's potential for health, reflected in his fascination with the Saviour. On the other hand, she can see that he is not willing to develop this potential, since he feels comfortable with his present situation. If Salomé were to adhere to the maxims of exceptional mental health, she would leave the prophet alone, and not take offence at his ravings. The true personality of man will not meddle with others, says Wilde, but love them because they are different (CW 1084). In her mission to establish exceptional mental health on a fictional level, the princess seems to display one serious flaw – which long goes unchallenged by the implied author. The truth is that Salomé encourages Jokanaan to become healthier so that *she* is no longer lonely. Thus, she uses the idea of transcendental values to pursue selfish interests, which naturally weakens her argument. In her attempt to make the prophet comply with her wishes, Salomé eventually resorts to methods which Herod in the same situation refuses to use: coercion.

In order to defend her future course of action, the princess portrays the prophet as suffering from his condition just as much as she does – an assumption which is surprisingly little corroborated by text-internal evidence. She describes his cistern as a "tomb" (CW 556) from which she intends to free him, so that he – like her – can enjoy a new level of awareness in the experience of mutual love. However, Jokanaan displays little gratitude after his release, and he eventually returns to his prison voluntarily. Given the fact that the prophet is little cooperative,

Salomé portrays his religious dogmatism as suffocating, as if the prophetic role had been forced upon him: “[Thy hair] is like a crown of thorns which *they have placed* on thy forehead. It is like a knot of black serpents writhing round thy neck” (CW 559; my emphasis). Still, her subjective impression of a suffering young man stands in marked contrast to Jokanaan’s self-description as the “chosen of the Lord” (CW 558). What the princess is unable to see is that the prophet derives comfort and security from his role. Skynner himself maintains that there are no value systems which are inherently better or worse than others, precisely because they reflect people’s level of maturity: “The point is, each person interprets the prevailing myth or religion in a way that is appropriate to them – the *best understanding they can manage*” (Life 288; my emphasis). According to Skynner, a person does not *choose* to be narrow-minded – a fact that is not really made explicit in Wilde’s *Salomé*, neither by the protagonist nor the implied author himself. Since Salomé does not perceive Jokanaan’s religion as useful to him, she figures that he is not much alive anyway, so he might as well be executed in the name of love: “[T]he mystery of love is greater than the mystery of death. Love only should one consider” (CW 574). Salomé’s idea seems to be that she will flout the maxims of exceptional mental health only once, in order to force Jokanaan into an ecstatic union with her. Having realised the logic and sensibility of her proposition, the prophet will naturally open his eyes – despite being dead – and look at the princess with love.

The final outcome of Salomé’s action is not really what she expected: the prophet will not look at her after all. If her advice “Love only should one consider” is supposed to be addressed to Jokanaan, the reader can see for himself that the prophet does not consider anything much anymore, because he is beheaded and Salomé has not really let him consider. She can implore the prophet’s head as much as she likes, Jokanaan cannot be persuaded to open his eyes, and the taste on his lips is bitter. There is an important ethical message behind the implied author’s decision to let Salomé’s mission for reciprocity fail on a fictional level. Her failure highlights the importance of one particular aspect of exceptional mental health which is indispensable for any self-improvement: initiative. Any development towards greater transparency or realism or a more positive attitude must spring from personal initiative. Where this ability is lacking, no changes can occur. On a fictional level, Salomé has to learn this bitter lesson by making the mistake of going too far. Having achieved no progress in their relationship by cutting off Jokanaan’s head, she finally seems able to accept a person’s limitations in changing the world: “*If thou hadst seen me thou wouldst have loved me. I, I saw thee, Jokanaan, and I loved thee*” (CW 574; my emphasis). The only part of the universe which Salomé is able to change is herself, and her relation to that universe. She cannot achieve the same changes in perception on behalf of others.

By trying to force Jokanaan first into a meeting and then into a kiss, Salomé is denying him exactly that right to initiative which has made her capable of developing towards greater health herself. As the plot shows, every instance of love in the play is dependent on the lover's initiative, not the irresistibility of the object of desire. Salomé should know this all too well. The First Soldier is altogether immune to her sensuality, without being hostile, and he does not feel obliged to obey her orders. This should be evidence enough that love is a feeling which the lover creates. As her long monologue shows, Salomé's devotion to Jokanaan as well as her assessment of his personality has not changed since he rejected her. Instead of "I will kiss thy mouth," she could as well have said "*If thou gavest me permission, I would kiss thy mouth*" to express her feelings for the prophet. Still, Salomé could never have known that Jokanaan's unresponsiveness towards her cannot be changed through coercion, had she not tried it and failed. Now she knows. Her stream of consciousness reveals that she considers the moment where things could have been mended to lie in the past, where Jokanaan could have consented. Salomé's subsequent single-handed action, on the other hand, was without success, and she realises that she does not get anywhere without cooperation: "What shall I do now, Jokanaan" (CW 574). It is moving to see Salomé ask the young prophet for advice in this situation, and this contradicts Donohue's accusation that the princess is only interested in Jokanaan's body ("Distance" 128).

Eventually, the princess seems happy to have found her place. She realises that she can only offer herself in love or friendship, but she cannot *force* anyone to love her for that. As Tennov puts it, "[a]ffection and fondness have no "objective"; they simply exist as feelings in which you are disposed toward actions to which the recipient might or might not respond" (71). The intensity of feeling which he has experienced in her thwarted love affair with Jokanaan is experienced as so fulfilling that it is enough for a lifetime. In addition, the very fact that she has to experience her beloved's death brings to light the value of his existence, and the fact that all of her actions spring from originally good intentions enables her to love herself. The formerly disengaged and elitist princess is awakened to a love of life and a love of other people as they are. Her final lines signal her willingness to communicate her positive feelings to others even if she is denied any positive feedback: "They say that love hath a bitter taste. . . . But what of that? What of that? I have kissed thy mouth, Jokanaan" (CW 575; ellipsis in original).

There are of course a couple of problems in connection with Salomé's conclusion which the implied author struggles to resolve. For one, the princess has arrived at her insight as a consequence of having broken the guidelines of healthy behaviour. This, of course, makes her experience non-repeatable. In her next encounter with a man less healthy than her she *would* have to respect his uncooperativeness, which might make her as disillusioned as Herod in the long run.

In addition, Patricia Kellogg-Dennis assumes that Salomé does not even realise what she has done wrong (229), a valid comment given the ethical vagueness of Salomé's final words compared to her long monologue. In other words, Kellogg-Dennis suggests that the princess does not partake in the insight shared by the implied author and the reader, namely that the promotion of health cannot be achieved with unsound methods, and that one person's interest in exceptional mental health does not excuse the sacrifice of other people's happiness. Eventually, critics disagree about whose ethos the implied author actually supports. Some suggest that it is that of Salomé, some suggest that of Herod, and still others "fear" that it might be that of Herodias: "If Salome, the embodiment of symbolism, has succumbed to perversion and met with destruction, and if Herod, also a strong proponent of metaphysical imagery, has been the agent of this destruction, we are left with only Herodias, the down-to-earth realist" (Thuleen, n. pag.).

However, the intricate way in which the implied author structures the play's finale is a direct reflection of his complex ethical sympathies. Kellogg-Dennis compares Wilde's finale to that designed by his predecessor Laforgue: "Therein [Salomé] tries to throw the severed head of the Baptist off a cliff, miscalculates, and ends up . . . by falling off the cliff herself" (229). In Laforgue's tale, Salomé is thus punished for her transgression by the implied author himself. In Wilde's play, too, Kellogg-Dennis sees the necessity of some sort of structural death penalty in order to convey that the insights of the protagonist are bought at too high a price. "Having consummated a moment of classical crime and decadent ecstasy," she holds, "Salome [sic] would have needed a *deus ex machina* to save her from Wilde's ending" (230; emphasis in original). Incidentally, however, there is just such a *deus ex machina* in Wilde's play, in form of an eye-catching stage direction: "*A moonbeam falls on SALOMÉ, covering her with light*" (CW 575). The reappearance of the moon is the implied author's structural affirmation of Salomé's final state of mind. Since her final ethical position is presented *after* that of Herod, we must take it as a sign that the implied author sees hopeful expectation as a superior basis for interpersonal encounter than disillusion. As a matter of fact, it is this affirmative stage direction which provokes the tetrarch, and his command to kill Salomé is in a way an act of rebellion against the implied author's ethos. By allowing Herod and Jokanaan to take revenge, however, the implied author achieves a double finale which helps to disconnect the positive and the negative aspects of his protagonist's mission in the mind of the reader. Salomé's ethical position is affirmed in the first stage direction, while the practical difficulties in connection with her mission are resolved by those characters who are personally affected by her transgressive actions.

Pedagogical Suicide

I would like to propose a third interpretation of Salomé's statement that "the mystery of love is greater than the mystery of death" and that "Love only should one consider" (CW 574). In my interpretation, it is an ethical proposition made explicitly by the implied author, addressed to the implied reader. The love which the implied author of *Salomé* considers greater than the mystery of death, and greater than fictional happiness, is his love for the reader. It is the reader who is to profit from the Salomé-experience, whatever the costs for the fictional characters. I will suggest here that Salomé and Jokanaan, if not the entire fictional cast, constitute a sacrifice on behalf of the implied author in the name of a greater cause, namely the ethical guidance of the reader. I can only hope that an exceptionally healthy reader can appreciate this sacrifice and use it well.

Albert Camus presents the idea of "pedagogical" suicide in his book *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, and this notion is very relevant to the discussion on exceptional mental health. We should expect that an individual who believes in transcendental values is willing to give his own life for the benefit of mankind. As Camus claims, however, ontological suicide in defence of one's beliefs can never be found in real life (17), although there are examples in fiction. The most touching instance of ontological suicide, according to Camus, can be found in Dostoevsky's novel *Devils*. Here we come across the intriguing character of Kirillov, who – displaying all the features of exceptional mental health – commits pedagogical suicide (Camus 147) in order to demonstrate to his fellow human beings that no outside force can determine their actions, that they are the masters of their own lives, and that they simply have to start living without being afraid. If one person is willing to prove human freedom in the most extreme fashion, Kirillov argues, no one else will ever have to doubt it again; instead, people will live in great glory. The sacrifice of Kirillov is touching for the very reason that he himself has no reason to die. On the contrary, he is very fond of life, and his ethos is not unlike that which we find in many works by Wilde: "Everything is good, everything. It's good for those who know it's good. If they knew it was good, it'd be good; but as long as they don't know it's good, it isn't good. That's my entire idea, the whole thing; there isn't any more" (Dostoevsky 250).

In an ironic twist in Dostoevsky's novel, Kirillov's sacrifice for the benefit of mankind fails to become publicly known. His original intention is to leave a suicide note explaining the affiliative motivation behind his deed, but unfortunately he is tricked by the story's antagonist into omitting this vital explanation from the eventual note. Within the closed fictional universe of the novel, none of the readers of this note is familiar with the abovementioned logical reasoning. Kirillov's suicide is regarded as an act of madness, and none of the fictional characters has become aware of his existential freedom to live. The only sane and healthy and affiliative

character in the novel dies in vain, and his hopeful ideas about mankind's potential and freedom are lost forever.

But has really nobody read Kirillov's intended suicide note? His collected conversations have been saved from oblivion due to the medium of literature, thus giving him a far greater audience than he could have hoped for. Obviously, someone has read the novel, listened to the fictional character, and understood his intentions. In his discussion of Kirillov's suicide, Camus has not become aware of the really ingenious part of the novel, a way of saving mankind which is possible only for a writer: He can sacrifice a fictional life for his own convictions, for the benefit of mankind. In *Devils*, Dostoevsky lets a fictional character give his fictional life in order to "prove" a general ethical proposition to the actual reader of the novel. Since the character of Kirillov is only an invention, the idea about self-will is not his own, but the author's. Within a large work of fiction, such an isolated ethical proposition can easily get lost – unless it is associated with a tragic event. If the idea is portrayed as being so important for the future welfare of mankind that a completely healthy and happy person is willing to give his life for it, it *must* catch any reader's attention. If the reader accepts Kirillov's successful suicide as sufficient proof for the validity of the author's ideas about universal human self-will, mankind has been saved without any real life being lost.

Although I cannot conclusively prove Wilde's indebtedness to Dostoevsky's novel, I would strongly suggest that the ideas presented in *Devils* find their way into many of his works, especially *Salomé*. Most rewarding is an analysis of the idea of pedagogical suicide as a means to promote exceptional mental health. In *Salomé*, the fictional protagonist sacrifices her own life and happiness in order to define and defend the limits of affiliative and transparent behaviour. To help her find this limit, the implied author sacrifices the equally fictional life of Jokanaan, so that the fictional princess can see for herself that she does not reach her goal with resorting to force. It is important for the pedagogical effect of the story that the protagonist is aware of the exact nature of her transgression, without regretting her mission on the whole. The insights mankind may gain from her experience are more important than her own life, which allows her to test even the consequences of transgression. It is also her own physical death which Salomé anticipates when she argues that "the mystery of love is greater than the mystery of death" (CW 574). In a Christ-like gesture, the princess is willing to accept punishment, thus redeeming the fictional universe with her death.

If everything were resolved on a fictional level, there would be little ethical work left to do in the author–reader discourse. The story would be consumed and forgotten, just like a completed action impulse sets the human organism at ease. If the real life of the actual reader is to

be changed, he must become ethically engaged, and for a literary work to have this effect, the fight for transcendental values must be *unrewarded* within the framework of the story itself – but not punished. Therefore, Salomé’s final execution is portrayed as logically entirely disconnected from her ethical proposition. As the final stage direction suggests, neither Herod nor Jokanaan comprehend Salomé’s final frame of mind, killing her instead in the conviction that her course of action was motivated by lewdness and self-gratification. As a consequence, her death appears ridiculously meaningless and unnecessary for an understanding of the play’s ethos. This, however, is exactly the implied author’s intention.

There is an interesting parallel between *Salomé* and Wilde’s short story “The Fisherman and his Soul,” which ends in an equally “disconcerting” way. Here, the natural phenomena which symbolise the implied author’s healthy ethos disappear as soon as the priest has understood their meaning and begins to preach accordingly. This again reflects Wilde’s general view that people should learn to do without external reference and confirmation. In “The Fisherman and his Soul,” it is the fictional priest who bears the responsibility for keeping the implied author’s ethos alive on a fictional level. In *Salomé*, Wilde goes one step further, by making even the survival of Salomé’s ethos on a fictional plane highly questionable. No doubt, the queen must have understood something when she says that she approves of her daughters actions. Her reaction can be seen as a sign of confidence that a dysfunctional network can be changed. Nevertheless, the implied author does not portray Herodias as a safe bet, which makes it the reader’s responsibility to keep the implied author’s ethical proposition alive. By letting his protagonist be executed for the wrong reasons, and leaving the effects of her mission on her fictional surroundings in doubt, the implied author achieves an important ethical effect. He invites the reader to complete Salomé’s argument by being the first to comprehend it, or else she has died in vain.

It is the adaptiveness of transparency for the real-life network of the reader which has to concern the implied author the most. Although the princess does not survive the completion of her mission very long on a fictional level, the reader does survive the play. At the same time, the reader is presumably in a far less dysfunctional environment than that portrayed in Wilde’s play. By having the fictional Salomé die in connection with her promotion of exceptionally healthy values without being understood, Wilde makes these values appear even more interesting. His fictional protagonist sets out to defend the appropriateness of healthy affiliative transparency in a hostile environment. The implied author’s main aim is to communicate to the reader that this sort of hostility, in fiction as in real life, is not to be accepted as unchangeable. Had the character of Salomé thus been shown to abandon her project at an early stage just because it poses a threat to other people’s dysfunctional design for life, the play would have sent the wrong message to the

reader. How can a writer give his readers a good enough example of how liberating transparency is for one's own development if he lets the mechanisms of control and repression be effective on a fictional level as well? Indeed, the development of the plot in *Salomé* shows that the system of repression is persuasive, and that an affiliative challenge to its rules does not necessarily result in an annihilating counter-attack. The fact that the character of Herodias approves of her daughter's behaviour, and that the moon reappears from behind the clouds, covering Salomé with light, give the reader the impression that even mistakes that are made in connection with transparent behaviour could theoretically be condoned in any given network. Still, Salomé's example shows that it is the affiliative aspects of every human being which make change possible. After all, Jokanaan's natural capacity to take in new ideas has the effect that his religious dogma becomes confused as soon as he is confronted with new impulses. In addition, it is Herod's natural integrity which makes him give an oath which he keeps. If Salomé's course of action demonstrates that even the two most exaggerated instances of repression can be overcome, the reader does not have to be in doubt about his own chances anymore. He can feel encouraged to behave in a healthier way towards others.

Still, the reader has to learn where the limits go. Up to which point can one expect to change one's environment without resorting to unhealthy methods? It is precisely for the benefit of the reader that Salomé has to go too far. Instead of the reader having to make his own mistakes, a fictional character has already made these mistakes for him. The reader learns that he cannot get further than to the point of transparent communication, and that the rest is dependent on the initiative of other people. After all, Salomé has tried to go beyond that point and failed. Also the feeling of love and desire finds its adequate expression in transparent communication, while the proceeding beyond that point does not intensify the emotion. In addition, Salomé discovers her own worthiness as a person without any encouraging feedback, so the reader should be able to do the same thing. Even the realization that everyone can become "monstrous" in a crisis can be gained from the reading experience alone. By sacrificing the happiness and future of the fictional heroine for the possible happiness of the reader, Wilde makes only too clear what matters most to him in his art. But unlike Dostoevsky, who emphasises that Kirillov's sacrifice would have been altogether in vain had it not been for the participation of the author, Wilde claims no merit for his part in saving mankind, but hands the victory gracefully over to his heroine. Salomé's final speech to Jokanaan's head is at the same time her suicide note to the world: "Love only should one consider." Leaving the note on the table is all the implied author can do. But will it be read?

The Importance of Initiative

The same limitations that Salomé has to accept in her world of fiction confront the play's implied author on a structural level. He wants to spread the news about exceptional mental health to others, but he has to take into account that his readers might operate on a different set of values. On a fictional level, Salomé's experience demonstrates that you cannot promote optimal health with dysfunctional methods; this will simply weaken your argument. Consequently, the implied author, too, has to respect his own rules in his attempt to convince the reader. An affiliative encounter between a healthy author and a healthy reader must spring from initiative on both sides. The implied author can express his interest in such an encounter by offering a set of ethical propositions expressed implicitly and explicitly in his work; having done so, he has to rely on the reader's initiative to complete the transaction by understanding and accepting this proposition. Indeed, no other of Wilde's works, essays or fiction, makes its structural ethos as dependent on the reader's will to co-operate as *Salomé* does.

Since the reader has obviously demonstrated initiative by coming to the book, the implied author must appreciate this gesture as a sign of goodwill. Now he must make sure that he does not scare his reader off again with direct accusations. For this reason alone, the literary form proves superior to any theoretical treatise for an ethical education of mankind. By creating an independent, closed, fictional network as the battlefield for ethical debates, the writer achieves a form of confrontation with his reader which is not direct. Since the fictional characters turn against one another with their accusations, this enables the implied author to be quite frank in the formulation of his views. Indeed, in the course of only one act, *Salomé* addresses every possible existential question and tries to find answers. No wonder if its characters are not spared any discomfort. They quarrel and challenge each other in public so that the reader can profit from their argument. They undergo changes in "remarkable dramatic compression" (Donohue "Symbolist" 98) which ordinary people need a lifetime to come to terms with or avoid. When it comes to subject matter, *Salomé's* healthy author is dictating the terms.

Nevertheless, it is important for the communication of his values that he does not coerce his reader into sharing his sympathies. Like a good therapist, the healthy author allows his reader to arrive at an ethical conclusion himself, rather than having it pointed out to him. Therefore, the choice of genre is in Wilde's case a deliberate ethical choice. By opting for the dramatic form and thus dispensing with an omniscient narrator, Wilde cuts down on the implied author's structural opportunities to act as an external commentator on the character's inherent personality traits or their expressed views. Traditionally, the dramatic form is objective per definition in the sense that it does not allow for evaluative stage directions, as they would be difficult to transfer into

dramatic gesture. Wilde, on the other hand, seems to have been completely unmindful of this fact, with the result that many of the stage directions in his plays are of the sort whose ethos cannot survive a transfer into performance (e.g. the description of the guests at the Chilterns' party in *An Ideal Husband*). Obviously, in the writing situation itself, he saw himself addressing an implied reader who could *read* these stage directions. Ironically, if we conceive of Wilde's dramatic form as having this purpose, his writing comes close to the polyphonic novel "invented" by Dostoevsky and praised by Bakhtin – with the important difference that the "narrative passages" are cut to the minimum which is necessary to carry the actual plot in the form of action. When Bakhtin claims that the dialogic passages in Dostoevsky's novels reflect the author's respect for his creation as independent subjects and his refusal to evaluate their subjective ethical propositions (16-18), he fails to address the implied author's obvious ethical presence in the connecting narrative passages. Wilde, on the other hand, eradicates the evaluating presence of the implied author almost completely – by returning to the dramatic form. In *Salomé*, the stage directions convey the characters' practical actions and not a lot more, while the dramatic speeches are entirely devoted to the characters' subjective evaluation of the world around them. As in a polyphonic novel, these conflicting ethical viewpoints do not have to be reconciled by the implied author in order to resolve the play's action (see Bakhtin 26). Thus, Wilde's tragedy actually comes closer to Bakhtin's ideal of ethical polyphony than Dostoevsky's own novels.

Since the play's fictional level depicts competing ethical value systems, the reader might expect the implied author to strengthen or else weaken some of these positions by supporting or undermining their truth value by means of "objective" stage directions. But even in this respect the implied author remains remarkably discrete. There are few stage directions that directly contradict or control the characters' statements, and most of these have the function of dispersing pessimist prejudices among the cast. Even rather explicit ethical statements like the reappearance of the moon by means of a stage direction is placed as one opinion among others, as it is directly followed by Salomé's execution at Herod's command – in yet another "objective" stage direction. That Wilde can do otherwise, by expanding stage directions into short narrative passages, becomes obvious in this example from *An Ideal Husband*: "MRS. CHEVELEY (*is now in an agony of physical terror. Her face is physically distorted. Her mouth awry. A mask has fallen from her. She is, for the moment, dreadful to look at*)" (CW 536). This stage direction is nothing if not didactic. Even a reader who might so far have sympathised with Mrs. Cheveley is directly instructed by the implied author that her previous appearance is to be understood as a mask, and that she *really* is an evil piece. In *Salomé*, on the other hand, such attempts at manipulating the reader's judgment are notably absent, or at least restricted to key passages, and the implied

author's refusal to do so can be taken as a sign of confidence in the reader's ability to make sound value judgments on his own.

At several places, the implied author's impartiality directly emphasizes the play's ethical multi-dimensionality, as in the case of "SALOMÉ *dances the dance of the seven veils*" (CW 570). If there is any place for the reader to do ethical work, it is here, and the stage direction "describing" this invisible dance unites in itself the play's ethical challenge to the reader. Among several possible value systems, the most adaptive has to be *chosen*. But in order to allow the implied reader to choose the play's healthy values, the implied author also has to offer him alternatives. One of the most remarkable aspects about *Salomé* is indeed that it incorporates more or less all levels of mental health including their self-justifying value systems. On a fictional level, then, all of these conflicting value systems are brought in contact with one another and have to recognize each other's independent existence. This allows the reader to see his own perception of the world evaluated from a different point of view without being directly challenged by another person. And even the reader who is not willing to change will at least feel that he has been listened to. Skynner quotes an undisclosed French physician, who describes a doctor's duty as "to cure sometimes; to relieve often; to comfort always" (*Life* 359).

Unfortunately, *Salomé* is the last of Wilde's works in which the parameters of exceptional mental health are observed on a structural level, and it is also the last in which enormous leaps in health are possible within the fictional universe. The author's comedies only confirm the intuition that there is a close bond between style and content. While the implied author in *Lady Windermere's Fan*, *A Woman of No Importance*, and *An Ideal Husband* manipulates and controls the ethical sympathies of his readers with the help of evaluative stage directions, the fictional characters promoting exceptional mental health have to settle for small adjustments, rather than radical change. The marriages of the Windermeres and the Chilterns are patched. Lord Illingworth has to give Mrs. Arbuthnot a proper reason to despise him, or she will not let go of the past. *The Importance of Being Earnest* confines itself to trivial questions altogether. Mrs. Erlynne's words to her fictional daughter seem to reveal much about the implied author's feelings for his audience: "You – why, you are a mere girl, you would be lost. You haven't got the kind of brains that enables a woman to get back. You have neither the wit nor the courage" (CW 413). Forced to earn money, yet eager to bring about at least some degree of change, Wilde had to settle for a lower level of health than he was capable of. The healthy reader can still learn much from these plays, but their important ethical propositions are no longer served on a silver platter.

Conclusion

The reason why I found it particularly rewarding to apply “scientific” parameters to an analysis of Wilde’s *Salomé* is that the work’s “meaning,” more than that of any other work I know, has been constructed by its critics. By this I do not simply mean completion of meaning, but directly constructing ethical certainties where the author does not do so. Where the implied author leaves an evaluative blank, the critic will promptly fill it. I will use this article by Donohue as a more or less random example:

In simple outline, this *was to be a play about* a young woman, hardly more than a girl, who falls *precipitously* in love with a man who *rigidly* spurns her advances; *in perverse retribution* she claims his severed head as the price of a *sensuous* dance before the Tetrarch – *only to be killed herself by the humiliated and outraged ruler*. . . . [T]he play is about *illicit but overwhelming* desire and its *fateful clash* with *ultimate authority*. (“Distance” 120-21; my emphasis)

We can see clearly that Donohue’s reaction to the play is laden with ethical values. He considers Salomé too young to be interested in a man, he assigns to her later action the motivation of revenge, he interprets the nature of her invisible dance, and he considers the fictional tetrarch to be the play’s ultimate authority. This would all be well and good, had he made explicit that he only talks about his subjective reaction to Wilde’s drama. Yet, the questionable part of his argument is that this is what the play is supposed to be about. In other words, Donohue claims that Wilde disapproves of the same values that he, the critic, disapproves of.

I would not have taken offence at this misconception, had Donohue’s article not appeared in a book which calls itself *The Cambridge Companion to Oscar Wilde* and which aims to be “an essential introduction for students” (qtd. from the book’s back cover). This means, however, that a previously unprejudiced reader is introduced to an author by a critic who calls himself the author’s companion but who turns out to be quite a dubious friend. I was lucky to have read *Salomé* before I read any criticism on the work, so I had not been previously instructed in *what* to find in the play. Other students may not be so lucky. The evaluative blanks will already be filled in their minds before they approach the text. The problem becomes even more serious due to the fact that one is certainly liable to put a degree of trust in the judgment of a “friend” who, after all, has spent years getting to know the ethos of this particular author. Even though I could back up my own ethical evaluation of Wilde’s play with the objective parameters of exceptional mental health, I found myself becoming increasingly unsure if these signs of hope and health, which the play undoubtedly contained, were put there by the author intentionally. So vehement was the critics’ opposition to the value system I am supporting.

The discrepancy between my own findings and traditional interpretations was consciousness-raising in many respects. For one, I became acutely aware how badly ethical criticism needs to undertake a thorough evaluation of its own value basis, and not only when it comes to ethical evaluations of fictional content. What I found entirely lacking in contemporary literary criticism is an ethical reading strategy. So far I have only looked at a literary work as the implied author's friendship offer, to use Booth's term, but I would also like to address the role of the critic who claims to be the author's friend, and who takes the liberty – as the author's friend – to convey his friend's intentions to a third person. Can it be that a critic's friendship offer can do a work more harm than good? Booth's definition of ethical criticism and its responsibilities is in itself highly ambiguous, as he seems to see the "critic" and the "reader" as two altogether different species:

Ethical criticism attempts to describe the encounters of a story-teller's ethos with that of the reader or listener. Ethical critics need not begin with the intent to evaluate, but their descriptions will always entail appraisals of the value of what is described: there are no neutral ethical terms, and a fully responsible ethical criticism will make explicit those appraisals that are implicit whenever a reader or listener reports on stories about human beings in action. (8-9)

Strictly speaking, a fully responsible critic should make explicit those appraisals that are implicit when *he himself*, as a reader, reports on a respective story. This, of course, requires an "ethics of reading," a topic which Booth is surprisingly little interested in: "It may well be true that to learn to read in some one superior way has an ethical value in itself, regardless of what we read. When that general claim becomes our whole interest, however, we lose all the variety of effect that will be our chief interest here" (9-10).

Booth's position is quite paradoxical. On the one hand, he claims that his ("our") interest in ethical criticism is not motivated by the desire to become a better reader and judge himself, although he seems to admit that his own reading technique is not optimal. On the other hand, he endeavours to describe – as a responsible critic A – an encounter between author B and reader C on the basis of his construction of author B with the help of an inherently imperfect reading strategy. This is, however, exactly what Stanley Fish complains about: "I did what critics always do: I 'saw' what my interpretive principles permitted or directed me to see, and then I turned around and attributed what I had 'seen' to a text and an intention" (299). Equally, Booth's later discussion of the "reader's responsibilities to other individual readers" (136) never takes into account that there are three entities involved, rather than two: the implied reader, the critic, and a third person. If he were to follow his own rules about responsible ethical criticism, he would have to make explicit that his strategy for constructing "intention" is an arbitrary choice – unless he is willing to search for an optimal way of reading ethically.

As it stands, Booth – who reveals himself to be quite an exploitative friend (222-23) – does not restrict the extent to which the reader is allowed to construct meaning where it is not explicitly fixed by the implied author (138-142). This might not be necessary for the kind of literature Booth prefers, in which case the reader’s simple task consists in surrendering (138). However, as I hope to have shown, the most important characteristic of an exceptionally healthy style is that it appeals to the reader’s ethical resources to *complete* the text’s ethical meaning. This means that the text “tolerates” (comp. Booth 90-92) an unhealthy interpretation as much as a healthy one. More dramatic, I would say, is that the healthiest texts are least able to defend themselves openly against unhealthy interpretations, and if they are as challenging in content as they are healthy in style they will be the ones that are most misconstrued. Booth does not consider the idea that the lack of self-scrutiny underlying his version of ethical criticism actually allows a critic to construct the intentions of his non-opposing healthy “friend” on the basis of an unhealthy value system, and then selling this unhealthy interpretation as the values of this very friend. The critical response to Wilde’s *Salomé* demonstrates how far-reaching and tragic these consequences can be. Eventually, even sincere friends of the author have trouble justifying their obvious fascination with Wilde’s “blasphemous Satanist play” (Nassaar “Renaissance” 82) in which the protagonist nevertheless is “celebrate[d]” (81) as the “true savior [sic]” (82). In the worst case, Wilde’s mission for exceptional mental health might have come to an end, because critics have managed to block the reader’s access to the author’s own words. The friendship offer of literary critics has turned into the most subtle yet effective form of ethical censorship.

By applying the parameters of exceptional mental health to ethical criticism, I hope to have offered an analytical tool to the ordinary reader which makes him independent of any critic-as-friend. When all is said and done, it takes no “initiated decadent or . . . analytic critic” (Nassaar “Renaissance” 82) to understand Wilde’s play and to like it. Basing his ethical judgment on his own experience and his own values, and being allowed to do so, the healthy reader is more than competent to evaluate the company he keeps. Most importantly, the parameters of health are equally applicable to the act of reading. A person’s general deficits in conversation, such as “mind-reading everybody else, and getting it all wrong” (Skynner, *Life* 28) or speaking on behalf of others, will manifest itself equally much in this person’s critical activity. By adhering to certain guidelines in our critical confrontation with other people’s thoughts, we will hopefully achieve a far more fruitful dialogue.

Interestingly, the non-interference on the part of the healthy author does not mean that the text yields to all sorts of interpretations. When I say that the author’s presence in the text is limited, I mean his “visible” presence. It is precisely this visible presence which a reader can spot

and resist, as noted by Booth (139-140). Yet what is more difficult to resist is the implied author's hidden presence in the play's structure, the play's overall structural ethos. In order to consciously resist a healthy structure one has to know where to look. In *Salomé*, the implied author's healthy structural ethos is repeated on a fictional level and reflected in explicit ethical propositions. Accordingly, the healthy reader who unconsciously feels attracted to the play's structure will unconsciously feel attracted to those explicit ethical propositions that reflect the structural ethos. An unhealthy reader, on the other hand, will feel attracted to certain unhealthy propositions, but will constantly be surprised by the play's structural developments which contradict his expectations. This way, Wilde manages to "fix" his ethical stance after all. If *Salomé* is to produce the effect of closure, the ethics of reading has to match the ethics of writing. These readers, as Lord Alfred Douglas predicts, "will find in Mr. Oscar Wilde's tragedy the beauty of a perfect work of art, a joy for ever, ambrosia to feed their souls with honey of sweet-bitter thoughts" (Beckson 140).

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