Salome's Dance: Literature and the Choreographic Imagination from Wilde to Beckett

PhD

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Abstract

This thesis considers representations of the biblical dancer Salome in the context of the broader choreographic imagination that formed across late nineteenth- and twentieth-century literary cultures. Through interdisciplinary readings of plays and poems, silent films, dancers' memoirs, newspaper reviews, and other sources, I show how Salome's dance, reinvented by Oscar Wilde in his play *Salomé* (1893), became the model for an array of responses to dance, creating new interplays between dramatic writing, choreography, and film aesthetics during this period. In light of the depictions of dancers associated with the late nineteenth-century schools of Decadence and Symbolism, the broad critical consensus regarding images of Salome has emphasised their misogyny, apparently precluding the opportunity for feminist interventions. However, I read Wilde's landmark play as a departure from earlier formulations of the Salome myth, showing how his text imagines a space for female performance that was creatively redeployed by later playwrights and dancers. Across my five chapters, I consider the fascination for dance displayed in texts by Wilde, W. B. Yeats, and Samuel Beckett alongside the work of more commonly overlooked performers and filmmakers, including Loïe Fuller, Maud Allan, Alla Nazimova, and Germaine Dulac, suggesting fresh ways of reading the historical and intertextual connections between these figures. Drawing in particular on accounts of dance and aesthetic philosophy in the recent work of Jacques Rancière, I unveil problematic constructions of the dancing body in writing of this period in order to show how dancers engaged with issues of gender and creative individualism on their own terms. The interdisciplinary approach that I develop draws on debates across modernist studies, film studies, cultural history, and dance studies, bringing to light neglected collaborations between playwrights and dancers, and thereby challenging received wisdoms about the literary canon and the boundaries between different art forms.

Contents

List of Illustrations

<u>Acknowledgements</u>

<u>Declaration</u>

I declare that this thesis is my own original work and that I am the sole author. This work has not been previously presented for the award of a degree at this or any other university. All of my sources are acknowledged in the references.

Abbreviations

CW   *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde.* 5th edition. Edited by Merlin Holland. London: Harper Collins, 1948. Reprinted 2003.

PI   *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde.* Volume 5, *Plays I: The Duchess of Padua, Salomé: Drame en un Acte, Salome: Tragedy in One Act.* Edited by Joseph Donohue. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

VP   *The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W. B. Yeats.* Edited by Peter Allt and Russell K. Alspach. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1957.

CP   *The Collected Plays of W. B. Yeats.* 2nd edition. London: Macmillan & Co., 1952. Reprinted 1960.

CDW   *The Complete Dramatic Works of Samuel Beckett.* London: Faber and Faber, 2006.

INTRODUCTION
An Obsessive Myth

On 15 March 1914, the *Washington Post* printed a rather alarming article written by David Edgar Rice, a Professor at Columbia University. Ominously titled "Why Danger Lurks in Nimble Toes of Dancing Stage Beauties," the piece alerted the American public to a recent disquieting surge in the number of dancers associated with "cases of divorce and love alienation."[1] Concerned by signs of what he saw as a trend in this matter, Rice had conducted a "statistical enquiry," leading him to discover that "dancers as a class are fully 20 per cent ahead of any other class in furnishing domestic and undomestic upheavals."[2] The sight of a woman dancing, declared Rice, "kindled [the] sluggish imagination" of man in his most primitive form, and through the ages, "the dancer was the only key to lands of imagination from which mankind drew power and inspiration."[3] Yet in her capacities as a visual stimulant, the dancer herself had gained an extraordinary "power" over the minds of her male spectators, and the dark manifestations of this influence were evident, according to Rice, in the recent spate of adulterous trysts involving dancers. Looking to religion and mythology to substantiate his psychological insights, the author naturally turned to the biblical figure whose dance, by the early twentieth century, had obtained an unparalleled degree of notoriety: Salome. Dancing at the request of her lascivious stepfather Herod Antipas, Salome used her influence to demand that the severed head of St John the Baptist be presented to her on a platter. A reluctant but captivated Herod acquiesced, ordering the execution of his prisoner in order to satisfy Salome's perverse desire. In Rice's view, this infamous exchange, precipitated by a single performance, demonstrated the ability of dancers to weave their deep psychological effects on the minds of helpless men, often to violent or sexually immoral ends.

While reflecting a widespread concern about Salome's popularity as a choreographic theme, this article also alluded to the powerful relationship, suggested by writers and artists throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, between the body of the dancer and the creative energies of the imagination. With a central focus

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[1] David Edgar Rice, "Why Danger Lurks in Nimble Toes of Dancing Stage Beauties," *Washington Post*, March 15, 1914, ProQuest.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid.

on the dance of Salome, this thesis explores the emergence of what I term a "choreographic imagination" in literary cultures during this period, considering the ways in which Salome's mythos prompted diverse collaborations between writers and performers. As a "key to lands of imagination," the body of Salome, across her different forms, has often been subjugated to the visionary impulses of poets, playwrights, and painters who have displaced the dancing woman as the author of her performance, mastering her moving body through the power of their art. It is this body that I seek to foreground on different terms, revealing the many forms of creativity Salome permitted for the women who recreated her dance. Drawing on plays and performances, poetry, silent films, paintings, photographs and illustrations, newspaper reviews, and dancers' memoirs, this thesis considers representations of Salome in the work of Oscar Wilde, W. B. Yeats, and Samuel Beckett alongside the work of more commonly neglected dancers and filmmakers including Loïe Fuller, Maud Allan, Alla Nazimova, and Germaine Dulac. I explore the historical, intertextual, and collaborative connections between these artists, and show how Salome's dance was gradually refashioned as an unlikely site of female authorship in the years following the publication of Wilde's *Salomé* (1893), as dancers bestowed their own interpretations upon this figure and shaped her literary forms by working alongside poets and playwrights. Before I review the range of scholarly debates that have informed my approach and conceptual framework, it is necessary to offer a brief history of the Salome myth in order to give a sense of the diverse and complex forms she adopted in the modern period.

"There are certainly obsessive myths that return in writing," observes Françoise Meltzer, cautioning that such narrative "returns" are invariably shaped by their own historical specificities, which subject such myths to continuous revision.[4] Salome is one such "obsessive" figure, whose dance was invoked in a wealth of contexts across nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature and culture. She first appeared, however, in the Gospels according to Mark (c. A.D. 65) and Matthew (c. A.D. 75), and in the nearly contemporaneous *Antiquities of the Jews* (c. A.D. 93) by the Roman historian Flavius Josephus.[5] The biblical texts do not name Salome, but record

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[4] Françoise Meltzer, *Salome and the Dance of Writing: Portraits of Mimesis in Literature* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 2.

[5] Matthew 14:1-12; Mark 6:14-29; Flavius Josephus, "Jewish Antiquities: Book XVIII, Chapter VIII," in *The Genuine Works of Flavius Josephus* (Birmingham: Christopher Earl, 1770), 604-605, accessed March 10, 2017, Gale Eighteenth Century Collections Online.

the dance of the daughter of Herodias at Herod's birthday feast, and her shocking request for the severed head of John the Baptist to be presented to her on a platter. Both Matthew and Mark suggest that Herodias encourages her daughter's gruesome demand, thereby framing Salome as a pawn in her mother's schemes. Herod Antipas had divorced his first wife in order to marry Herodias – the wife of his half-brother Philip –, a forbidden act that embroils Salome in a torrid history of adultery and incest, prompting John the Baptist's vocal criticisms of her mother. Moreover, as Alice Bach observes, since, historically, it is likely that the only woman present at Herod's feast would be a *hetaira* (a prostitute), it appears that even the brief biblical accounts ground Salome's dance in illicit sexuality, despite omitting further details of the performance.[6] In Josephus's *Antiquities*, Salome is named for the first time as the daughter of Herodias, but there is no mention of a dance, or, indeed, of a severed head. As Megan Becker-Leckrone cogently surmises in her assessment of the textual corpus surrounding Salome, in the Gospels "we had a deed without a name, here [in the *Antiquities*] we have a name without a deed."[7] These gaps and discrepancies characterise Salome's story: "the narrative effects of the intricate intertextuality which has not only perpetuated but actually constituted the Salome myth from the first (at least) to the twentieth century."[8] By the late nineteenth century, Salome was a composite and flexible figure, open to considerable reinterpretation.

Consolidated by the catalogue of alluring and monstrous women produced by nineteenth-century art – from Judith and Cleopatra to D. G. Rossetti's Lilith – Salome has traditionally been characterised as an emblem of male horror in the face of modern womanhood. In particular, she has been aligned with the figure of the *femme fatale*, and her inscrutable sister, the New Woman, and thereby allied with unconventional desires and sexual mores, along with anxieties about the oriental bodies emblematically linked to empires under threat.[9] Edward Said has shown that

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[6] Alice Bach, *Women, Seduction, and Betrayal in Biblical Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 227.

[7] Megan Becker-Leckrone, "Salome: The Fetishization of a Textual Corpus," *New Literary History* 26 (Spring 1995): 244.

[8] Ibid., 250-251. Anthony Pym has also explicated the difficulties of defining a Salome canon in "The Importance of Salomé: Approaches to a *Fin de Siècle* Theme," *French Forum* 14 (September 1989): 311-322. Becker-Leckrone rightly takes issue, however, with Pym's clear "privileging […] of texts that turn the whole 'theme' into an exchange between men, where the body of the woman is valued by men, and the woman at the heart of the story is ultimately displaced" (246-247).

[9] For discussion of Salome and the construction of the *femme fatale* see: Jess Sully, "Challenging the Stereotype: The *Femme Fatale* in *Fin-de-siècle* Art and Early Cinema," in *The Femme Fatale: Images, Histories, Contexts*, ed. H. Hanson and C. O' Rawe (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 46-59. See also

emergent ideas about the Orient and the Occident tended to feminise and exoticise the former, while conceptualising the latter as a literal and imagined space of masculine power.[10] Salome was one such exotic figure apparently awaiting conquest, although she was also thought to be capable of unnatural brutality. The fin-de-siècle that gave rise to these visions was itself a period of startling innovation, conflicting values, and, naturally, beginnings and ends. As Vincent Sherry contends in *Modernism and the Reinvention of Decadence*: "there was an intense sense of possibility and novelty in the air, but it was not detachable from the feeling of current civilization being at its end and a concomitant sense of dissolution in norms ranging from the literary to the moral."[11] Supposedly prone to unbridled sexual longings, and the violent urge to impair the man she desired, Salome's dancing body was framed in a stream of portraits as an object of dangerous excess to be contained by the creative vision of the artist, but also, conversely, as a site of aesthetic possibility and transformation.

What persisted across later versions of the Salome figure was the dance so briefly alluded to in the Gospels. Although images of Salome appeared frequently in medieval and Renaissance art, she became a ubiquitous figure in nineteenth-century French writing, reinvented as an oriental temptress, sexually ravenous and scantily-clad; one of the many "perverse virgins" represented in the art of the period.[12] The historian Peter Gay has shown that the nineteenth century was overrun with portrayals of vicious femininity, embodied by "the vengeful female, the murderous courtesan, the immortal vampire," and "the castrating sisterhood" – associated with Salome in particular.[13] Along with Stéphane Mallarmé's dramatic poem *Hérodiade* (1867), Salome was invoked in Joris-Karl Huysmans's novel *À Rebours* (*Against Nature*, 1884), Gustave Flaubert's short story "Hérodias" (1887), Jules Laforgue's "Salomé" in his *Moralities légendaires* (*Moral Tales*, 1887), and the paintings of Henri Regnault and Gustave Moreau, to cite only a selection.[14] Although these precursors undoubtedly

Rebecca Stott, *The Fabrication of the Late-Victorian Femme Fatale: The Kiss of Death* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1992).

[10] Said also refers to Salome specifically as typifying the sensuous, dangerous womanhood that fascinated writers like Flaubert, Swinburne, and Baudelaire, shaping their work on the Orient. See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003), 180.

[11] Vincent Sherry, *Modernism and the Reinvention of Decadence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 7.

[12] Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 352-402.

[13] Peter Gay, *Education of the Senses: The Bourgeois Experience: Victoria to Freud* (London and New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999), 201.

[14] Along with Anthony Pym and Megan Becker-Leckrone's articles, these nineteenth-century literary and artistic versions of Salome have been catalogued in a number of earlier studies including: Helen

left their mark on the dense Symbolist language of Oscar Wilde's *Salomé,* his play introduced critical new elements to the story, namely the "dance of the seven veils" and the shocking final consummation, in which Salome kisses the lips of John the Baptist's (Iokanaan's) severed head, before an aghast Herod orders her execution.[15] Inspired by Wilde in many instances, countless writers, performers, and filmmakers then went on to reimagine Salome and her dance in particular, prompting the eruption of a phenomenon that commentators anxiously termed "Salomania."[16]

Wilde's play was promptly banned by the English censor in 1892 but published versions of the text in French and English gained an extraordinary grip on the popular imagination, exacerbated by the added controversy surrounding Wilde's trials in 1895.[17] Sarah Bernhardt, Loïe Fuller, Maud Allan, Ida Rubinstein, Theda Bara, Martha Graham, and Rita Hayworth were just a few of the performers who came to be associated with the dance of Salome. In 1905, Richard Strauss composed the opera *Salome,* based on Wilde's play, and a range of silent films dedicated to the subject were released, starting with J. Stuart Blackton's *Salome* (1908).[18] Salome also enjoyed extensive literary afterlives, materialising in the Michael Field poem "A Dance of Death" (1912), Ezra Pound's playful divagation from Laforgue, "Our Tetrarchal Précieuse" (1918), and Anzia Yezierska's *Salome of the Tenements* (1923). For W. B. Yeats, Salome seems to have been something of an obsession, recurring in his works "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" (1921) and *A Vision* (1925), and throughout his dance-dramas. Salome also endures as a kernel of an idea in many twentieth-century literary mediations on dance and bodily severance, leaving her signature on John

Zagona, *The Legend of Salome and the Principle of Art for Art's Sake* (Geneva: Droz, 1960); Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, trans. Angus Davidson (New York: Meridian Books, 1956).

[15] As Praz notes, Heinrich Heine also had his Herodias kiss the head of John the Baptist in *Atta Troll* (1843), but this poem crucially conflates the desires of mother and daughter and makes Herodias the key figure. See *The Romantic Agony,* 299-302.

[16] Richard Bizot, "The Turn-of-the-Century Salome Era: High- and Pop-Culture Variations on the Dance of the Seven Veils," *Choreography and Dance* 2 (1992): 71-87.

[17] A number of scholars have explored the social and political contexts surrounding Wilde's trials and their legacy. See, for example, Michael Foldy, *The Trials of Oscar Wilde: Deviance, Morality, and Late Victorian Society* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1997); also see Merlin Holland, ed. *The Real Trial of Oscar Wilde: The First Uncensored Transcript of the Trial of Oscar Wilde vs. John Douglas Marquess of Queensbury, 1895* (New York: Fourth Estate, 2003).

[18] A good deal of criticism has compared Strauss's treatment of the Salome theme to other versions; see, for example, Lawrence Kramer, "Culture and Musical Hermeneutics: The Salome Complex," *The Cambridge Opera Journal* 2 (1990): 269-294; Petra Dierkes-Thrun, "'The Brutal Music and the Delicate Text?': The Aesthetic Relationship between Wilde's and Strauss's *Salome* Reconsidered," *Modern Language Quarterly* 69, no. 3 (2008): 367-389.

Berryman's image of "violent and formal dancers" and Samuel Beckett's *Not I* (1972), a play inspired by Caravaggio's *Decollation of St John the Baptist* (1608).[19]

It has been necessary to omit a number of these examples from deeper consideration. My case studies have been selected on the basis that they approach Salome's dance as an element of performance, rather than as a mere literary image or a static visual representation. The realities of the dance as performed material open up issues of authorship, collaboration, and synthesis across the arts, which sit at the heart of this project. The major authors I consider – Wilde, Yeats, and Beckett – were all informed by the French literary cultures that fetishised Salome's image, but they either wrote in English, worked across languages, or translated their own work into English. Clearly, these figures also add an Irish dimension to this thesis, on which I reflect at critical moments. The relationship between Salome and Irish mythology, for instance, is particularly relevant to my discussion of Yeats's dance-dramas, which were shaped by his own form of cultural nationalism and related ambitions for the Abbey Theatre. Although my approach has been informed by debates in Irish studies relating to the intertextual resonances between these authors, this project does not seek to contribute to a specifically Irish genealogy of literary modernism and dance. The performers and filmmakers I introduce alongside these playwrights proffer different kinds of comparative readings, showing how the individuals I discuss worked both imaginatively and literally across geographic and cultural boundaries, as well as across different art forms. Wilde's *Salomé* provides a suggestive starting point since its controversial reception ensured that it was extensively adapted and reimagined. Crucially, Wilde also made the dance a definitive feature of his dramatic composition.

Wilde's key innovation in Salome's long and confounding history was the introduction of the "seven veils" to the dance. Although Wilde gives no further directions for the choreography itself in *Salomé*, the veils confer upon the dancer's body an almost talismanic power, singularly defined by the promise and the impossibility of revelation.[20] The veil is, of course, an object inscribed with a host of conflicting moral and cultural delineators, which continue to define its plural modern

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[19] John Berryman, "The Song of the Demented Priest," in *The Heart is Strange: New Selected Poems* (New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 2014), 28. Beckett commented to Avigdor Arikha and James Knowlson that *Not I* was inspired by the Caravaggio painting he saw in Malta; see Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996), 588.

[20] Wilde's source for the veiled dance may have been the myth of the Babylonian goddess Ishtar, who shed a veil at each gate in the underworld as she journeyed to find her lover. See Becker-Leckrone, "The Fetishization of a Textual Corpus," 254.

usages. My conceptual approach to Salome's veiled dance in its literary and performance contexts has been informed by Roland Barthes's influential critique of myths as forms shaped by dominant cultural narratives designed to reinforce particular systems of power. In his essay on "Striptease," one of the phenomena he analyses in his *Mythologies* (1957), Barthes writes that the erotic illusion of the dancer's performance is contingent on the sustained veiling of her body, since, he argues, "Woman is desexualized at the very moment when she is stripped naked."[21] Ironically, for Barthes, the final moment of the striptease signifies "nakedness as a *natural* vesture of woman, which amounts in the end to regaining a perfectly chaste state of the flesh."[22] Structures of thought that equate "natural" womanhood with chastity, while vilifying and sensationalising female sexuality, shaped historical representations of dancing women in general and constructions of Salome particularly. Indeed, women's bodies have all too often been embedded in limiting definitions of nature, imagined as inhabiting, in Rita Felski's words, "a sphere of atemporal authenticity seemingly untouched by the alienation and fragmentation of modern life," associated with sensuous, the irrational, and the emotional, in opposition to the reason and intellect of the modern man.[23]

Crucially, in his reading of the striptease, Barthes recognises the singular power of the dancer, whose technique allows her to assert control over the spectacle, creating a critical distance between her dancing body and the voyeuristic gaze of the spectator:

> Thus we see the professionals of striptease wrap themselves in the miraculous ease which constantly clothes them, makes them remote, gives them the icy indifference of skilful practitioners, haughtily taking refuge in the sureness of their technique: their science clothes them like a garment.[24]

Barthes's description, like many other conceptual approaches to the body, here draws on the notion of *technē*, the ancient Greek term for craftsmanship that aligns ideas about embodied practice with those of knowledge and learning.[25] Outlining his theory

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[21] Roland Barthes, "Striptease," in *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (London: Vintage, 2009), 97.
[22] Ibid., 98.
[23] Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 16.
[24] Barthes, "Striptease," 99. The striptease persists as a metaphor across Barthes's work, and he uses it to describe the veiling of language and reading processes in *The Pleasure of the Text*, asking: "Is not the most erotic portion of the body *where the garment gapes*?" See Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), 9.
[25] In "The Question Concerning Technology" (1954) Martin Heidegger defines *technē* as "the name not only for the activities and skills of the craftsman, but also for the arts of the mind and the fine

of the "technique of the body," the French sociologist Marcel Mauss similarly identified the body as "man's first and most natural technical object, and at the same time technical means."[26] Using dance as one of his case studies, Mauss asserts that "training, like the assembly of a machine, is the search for, the acquisition of an efficiency."[27] Although Barthes reads the body of the striptease artist as a site of learning and technique that enables the dancer to make art, Mauss reminds us that this creative drive can be similar to the drive of the machine: learned, habitual, and predetermined. Yet Barthes's interpretation of the striptease does complicate the notion that the veiled dance subjects the performer to the acquisitive gaze of the viewer. While one reading of Salome's veils might have her body reduced to a passive object of male desire, the veils also create a space cut off from the spectator's gaze into which the dancer can retreat, suggesting a position from which the female performer might both engineer the dance and assert control of her body. As Sally Banes observes, dance has the power to facilitate precisely this kind of feminist reckoning: "through dance, men's attitudes toward women and women's attitudes about themselves are literally given body on stage."[28] Salome's dance may seem to be rooted in the sensual allure of the body; in libidinous female nature submitting to the demands of a patriarchal authority, but Salome crucially asks for something in return: her dance compels Herod into an irrational exchange, and she obtains, through her performance, the broken body of the man she desires.

Considering Salome's dance as her primary means of expression, this thesis argues further that her dance was an elemental part of the choreographic imagination that took shape in the literature of the fin-de-siècle. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a range of individuals declared dance an ideal model for the exigencies of literary practice. For Mallarmé, the serpentine dancer Loïe Fuller was "la forme théâtrale de poésie par excellence" [the ideal theatrical form of poetry], her dance creating lyrical movements with the human body that the written word struggled to match.[29] Years later, in "A Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry" (1928), T. S. Eliot praised the literary potential of a different form of dance, asking: "if there is a

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arts. *Technē* belongs to bringing-forth, to *poiēsis*." See *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Garland Publishing, 1977), 13.

[26] Marcel Mauss, "Techniques of the Body," trans. Ben Brewster, *Economy and Society* 2, issue 1 (1973): 75.

[27] Ibid., 77.

[28] Sally Banes, *Dancing Women: Female Bodies on Stage* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1998), 1.

[29] Stéphane Mallarmé, "Autre étude de danse: les fonds dans le ballet d'après une indication recent," in *Igitur, Divagations, Un Coup de dés*, ed. Bertrand Marchal (Paris: Gallimard, 2003), 207.

future for drama and particularly for poetic drama, will it not be in the direction indicated by the ballet?"[30] Eliot's question alludes to both the stylistic parallels and the collaborative practices that developed between the ballet and the theatre in the first decades of the twentieth century, underlined by experimental productions such as *Parade* (1917), and the establishment of a School of Ballet at W. B. Yeats's Abbey Theatre in 1927. The impact of Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes on the cultural landscape of modernism was far-reaching, and modern dancers such as Loïe Fuller and Isadora Duncan had a profound influence on artists and writers including Mallarmé, Auguste Rodin, and Edward Gordon Craig.[31] Dance also became a favourite subject for silent film pioneers, and some of the earliest films recorded by the Lumière brothers captured the performances of the skirt dancers who took Paris by storm in the 1890s. This thesis explores Salome's position in these broader cultural transmissions, showing how her dance, reinvented by Wilde at the fin-de-siècle, infiltrated a range of literary and cinematic engagements with the figure of the dancer.

My critical models for this project are necessarily diverse. In her recent study *The Drowned Muse,* Anne-Gaëlle Saliot follows the cultural history of a single figure, "l'Inconnue de la Seine" (the unknown woman of the Seine), from the nineteenth century to the present day. To an extent, Salome shares with the Inconnue a set of veiled and elusive rhetorical functions; both are "often so discreetly encoded in texts and images that [they] can, at times, be present without being visible."[32] Constructing a corpus around this "cultural ghost," Saliot shows how the transformations of a lone object can "constitute points of negotiation through which to understand modernity," an aim resolutely shared by this thesis.[33] Yet unlike the Inconnue, an apparent victim of suicide whose beautiful image was fanatically reproduced across French culture, Salome is not an anonymous icon: she has a textual history, albeit a fragmented one. Her reproductions derive, not from the copy of an original body set in plaster, but from those brief, tantalizing lines in the Gospels. In this sense, she is perhaps more reflective of Goethe's Mignon, a minor character in *Wilhelm Meisters*

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[30] T.S. Eliot, "A Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry," in *T. S. Eliot: Selected Essays, 1917-1932* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & co., 1932), 34.
[31] See Juliet Bellow, *Modernism on Stage: The Ballets Russes and the Parisian Avant-Garde* (London: Routledge, 2013); Davinia Caddy, *The Ballets Russes and Beyond: Music and Dance in Belle-Époque Paris* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
[32] Anne-Gaëlle Saliot, *The Drowned Muse: The Unknown Woman of the Seine's Survivals from Nineteenth-century Modernity to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 24.
[33] Ibid., 25; 28.

Lehrjahre (1796), whose legacy is traced by Terence Cave in *Mignon's Afterlives*.[34] Like Salome, Mignon is primarily a literary figure, and she is a dancer – at times she performs acrobatically and moves like a puppet. Cave also emphasises Mignon's "value as a 'figure to think with' [which] derives to a large extent from her position, in the overwhelming majority of her afterlives, as a problematic threshold."[35] As a dancer whose veils constitute points of representational crisis, or "that which can – and cannot – be represented," according to Marjorie Garber, Salome might also be construed as a "figure to think with": her evolutions marking the course of cultural history.[36]

Ever since Frank Kermode described Salome as "an emblem of the perfect work of art" in his landmark *Romantic Image*, critics have often concentrated on her value as a Symbolist icon at the expense of performance.[37] Although Kermode's work has been influential for the insights developed in this thesis, his reading of Salome as an "impassive" figure risks displacing the body of the woman by prioritising the vision of the poet, whose language, he claims, resolves the tensions between motion and fixity apparently embodied by the dancer. "The beauty […] of a woman in movement," Kermode writes, "is the emblem of the work of art or Image."[38] As woman becomes symbol, her movement is precisely what is jeopardised.[39] Indeed, such critical strategies accord with what Rosi Braidotti has described as "the mental habit of translating women into metaphor."[40] My own thinking around the issue of Salome's double life as a (textual or visual) image and as a body in performance has been informed by Braidotti's claim in *Patterns of Dissonance* that "the celebration of femininity reduced to metaphors of the void, lack, non-being, the valorisation of woman as textual body, rather than female-sexed body, hides one of the most

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[34] Terence Cave, *Mignon's Afterlives: Crossing Cultures from Goethe to the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). Saliot also uses this study as one of her models, observing that both the Inconnue and Mignon are "cultural figures mutating between media, genres, and movements, between intellectual and popular cultures, between languages and countries." See *The Drowned Muse*, 26.

[35] Cave, *Mignon's Afterlives*, 4.

[36] Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 341.

[37] Frank Kermode, *Romantic Image* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957), 75. See also Zagona, *The Legend of Salome*, 11. As suggested by her title, Zagona's focus is on Salome's relationship to nineteenth-century aestheticism, and she largely overlooks issues of performance.

[38] Kermode, *Romantic Image*, 57.

[39] Sarah Maier observes of Salome that "to be symbol is to be passive"; see Sarah E. Maier, "Symbolist Salomés and the Dance of Dionysus," *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 28 (2006): 214.

[40] Rosi Braidotti, quoted in Teresa de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film and Fiction* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), 24.

formidable types of discrimination exercised against women."[41] Although Salome's status as an object of aesthetic contemplation has been thoroughly investigated, the women who reinvented her dance have often been critically side-lined, thereby reducing Salome's purpose to that of static muse.

As Felski cautions in *The Gender of Modernity*, however, critics must beware of "an epistemological dualism which assumes that men's writing must invariably distort female experience whereas women's writing provides true access to it."[42] I do not argue that all representations of Salome in men's writing of this period trade exclusively in misogynistic assumptions about women's bodies, or that women alone offer an escape from such stereotypes, be this through literature or dance. Rather, I trace patterns and recurring tropes and motifs across a wide array of texts and images, some of which reproduce familiar assumptions about women's bodies, while others complicate and divert from these same systems of thought. Moreover, there are collusions and contradictions within single case studies, and I do not attempt to mask these differences by producing a unified or overarching narrative regarding Salome's many transformations after Wilde. Nonetheless, this project remains alert to the often-overlooked interventions staged by female dancers and filmmakers and acknowledges the gendered aspects of critical judgements accorded to particular texts and images of this period.

In part, this research takes its lead from the approach to Salome's dance explored through the lens of feminist performance in the work of Susan Glenn and Julie Townsend, among others.[43] In a chapter on Salome dancers in her study *Female Spectacle*, Glenn stresses that most critics "miss Salome's transformation into a pliant figure of entertainment," and she opens up the marginalised histories of female (and male drag) performers dancing as Salome on the early twentieth-century stage.[44] Similarly, Mary Simonson argues that, unlike literary texts, "performance offers a site of resistance and female authorship" that undermines the conventional treatment of

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[41] Rosi Braidotti, *Patterns of Dissonance: A Study of Women and Contemporary Philosophy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 134
[42] Felski, *The Gender of Modernity*, 32.
[43] Susan A. Glenn, "The Americanization of Salome: Sexuality, Race, and the Careers of the Vulgar Princess," in *Female Spectacle: The Theatrical Roots of Modern Feminism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 96-125; Julie Townsend, "Staking Salomé: The Literary Forefathers and Choreographic Daughters of Oscar Wilde's 'Hysterical and Perverted Creature'," in *Oscar Wilde and Modern Culture: The Making of a Legend,* ed. J. Bristow (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2008), EBSCOhost.
[44] Glenn, *Female Spectacle*, 97.

"Salome's dance as a phantom-like, mystical 'truth'."[45] Although these accounts of Salome's dance have clarified the importance of performance to feminist readings of this dancer, I make a consistent effort to complicate Simonson's contention that the literary tradition formed around Salome does not "seem to allow any feminist wiggle room."[46] Rather, the textual intricacies of the Salome-themed works I consider reveal a series of complex engagements between writers and performers, through which dancers were able to assert their corporeal agency within texts, inform the shape of dramatic material, and recalibrate the hierarchy of author and actor.

Salome has been the cornerstone of other studies, notably those of Petra Dierkes-Thrun, Helen Zagona, and Toni Bentley. In her early treatment of the biblical theme, Zagona contemplates Salome's significance as a symbol for the Aesthetic movement, tracing her manifestations in nineteenth-century writing and reading Wilde's play as "a virtual summing up of the theme's history from 1841 to 1891," rather than a point of departure for twentieth-century reinventions.[47] Bentley, on the other hand, explores the cases of four modern dancers who performed as Salome – Maud Allan, Mata Hari, Ida Rubinstein, and Colette –, but does not fully admit to Salome's deeper purchase in literary cultures, thereby omitting crucial aspects of her wider history.[48] *Salome's Modernity: Oscar Wilde and the Aesthetics of Transgression* by Petra Dierkes-Thrun is the richest and most detailed of these investigations. Exploring the aesthetic and philosophical legacies of Wilde's play through readings of Nietzsche, Bataille, and Foucault, Dierkes-Thrun traces the fascinating emergence of "utopian erotic and aesthetic visions of individual transgression" across adaptations of Wilde's *Salomé*, including Strauss's opera, Allan and Nazimova's performances, and later twentieth-century films.[49] Her study opens up the issues of agency and power that shaped Salome's incarnations, explicated through insightful close readings and historical details that show how the twentieth-century fantasies concentrated around Wilde repurposed the disruptive vision of his play.

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[45] Mary Simonson, "Choreographing Salome: Re-creating the Female Body," in *Body Knowledge: Performance, Intermediality and American Entertainment at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 28-29.

[46] Simonson, *Body Knowledge*, 29.

[47] Zagona, *The Legend of Salome*, 11. For a recent critical assessment of Wilde's play, see Michael Y. Bennett, ed. *Refiguring Oscar Wilde's Salome* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011).

[48] Toni Bentley, *Sisters of Salome* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2002).

[49] Petra Dierkes-Thrun, *Salome's Modernity: Oscar Wilde and the Aesthetics of Transgression* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 2.

Dierkes-Thrun does, however, adopt rhetorical strategies historically deployed to instil clear divisions between the subversive and the normative – a rubric this thesis seeks to challenge. Certainly, it is valid to read *Salomé* as a "transgressive" play, but there are many instances where her dance was adopted by bourgeois society or by more conservative figures, such as Yeats, which meant that she took on a wealth of different cultural and political meanings. Dierkes-Thrun is alert to these plural effects: she notes the "astonishing rhetorical malleability" of Salome and Wilde as figures directed towards "opposed cultural and social ends."[50] Yet by foregrounding the term "transgression" she posits an underlying equivalence between individual agency and ideas of subversion, agitation, and rebellion. While yielding some very productive results, this is not a connection that maps easily onto all of the case studies considered here. Furthermore, it creates particular tensions where female dancers and filmmakers are concerned, as it was judgements on female "transgression" that compounded women's exclusion from the canons of literature and film and supported the very hierarchies that Dierkes-Thrun seeks to challenge. In the case of Salome specifically, the notion of "transgression" allowed her to be consistently read in terms of the recurring dichotomies long used to pejoratively critique women's bodies (such as the "natural" versus the "monstrous"). As a critical term and a method of approach, "transgression" has its limits.

Other studies and articles have addressed the relationship between Wilde's play and Aubrey Beardsley's illustrations, the history of the play's censorship, and Salome's afterlives in opera and performance.[51] As well as preoccupying literary and musical critics, Salome has occasionally been the focus of dance scholars; for example, a recent issue of *Dance Research* included a section on "The Dance of Salome and its Heritage."[52] Although a number of these articles offer illuminating interdisciplinary readings of Salome's dance that have proved valuable to my own work, there has been no sustained attempt to chronicle in depth the relationship between Salome's dance and other histories of dance and literary modernism. My aim is to highlight the need

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[50] Dierkes-Thrun, *Salome's Modernity*, 197.
[51] See, for example: J. P. Riquelme, "Shalom/Solomon/*Salomé*: Modernism and Wilde's Aesthetic Politics," *The Centennial Review* 39 (Fall 1995): 575-610; Matthew Lewsadder, "Removing the Veils: Censorship, Female Sexuality, and Oscar Wilde's Salome," *Modern Drama* 45 (2002): 519-544; Linda Gertner Zatlin, "Wilde, Beardsley, and the Making of Salome," *Journal of Victorian Culture* 5 (2000): 341-357.
[52] See Peter Cooke, "It isn't a Dance: Gustave Moreau's *Salome* and *The Apparition*," *Dance Research* 29 (2011): 214-232; Daria Santini, "That Invisible Dance: Reflections on the 'Dance of the Seven Veils' in Richard Strauss's *Salome*," *Dance Research* 29 (2011): 233-245; Marion Kant, "Approaches to Dance (2): Influences," *Dance Research* 29 (2011): 246-250.

for new dialogues across critical contexts such as the relationship between modern dancers and early feminist politics; the elaboration of new "languages" of movement in dance and silent film; and the collaborative processes that underpinned realisations of Salome's dance on stage. A detailed examination of Salome's dance has the potential to enrich our understanding, not only of this enigmatic figure's endless permutations, but also of modernism's relationship with choreography more broadly, revealing a history of unlikely influences and partnerships stemming from a central fascination with dancers and their art.

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Covering a range of artistic forms and practices from the fin-de-siècle to what might traditionally be considered modernism's closing years, this thesis adopts a sustained interdisciplinary approach informed by a number of theoretical perspectives. Jacques Rancière's theory of the "aesthetic regime of art" – distinct from the "ethical" and "representational" regimes he also identifies – crystallises around his discussion of the modern period in his recent work *Aisthesis: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art*. For Rancière, the "ethical regime of images," which he associates with Plato's Republic, adjudicates on the nature of art by considering images "in terms of their intrinsic truth and of their impact on the ways of being of individuals and of the collectivity."[53] In this system, art is considered in terms of its public effects – and its truthfulness – rather than its artistic qualities and is therefore denied aesthetic autonomy. The "representational regime," on the other hand, revolves around the internal conventions of artistic disciplines and so works are judged according to their expressive and representational properties. Under this regime, the arts are separated according to a hierarchy of forms, and the idea of creative work emerges as a practice divorced from ordinary life.[54] The "movement belonging to the aesthetic regime," which Rancière associates with the development of aesthetic philosophy, "supported the dream of artistic novelty and fusion between art and life subsumed under the idea of modernity, [and tended] to erase the specificities of the arts and to blur the

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[53] Jacques Rancière, *Aesthetics and its Discontents*, trans. Steven Corcoran (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), 28.
[54] Ibid., 29.

boundaries that separate them from each other and from ordinary experience."[55] Between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries, art "ceaselessly redefined itself – exchanging, for example, the idealities of plot, form and painting for those of movement, light, and the gaze."[56] Ephemeral forms conjured by the moving body and the play of light in space were newly juxtaposed with the printed word and the proscenium arch.

Such an exchange between art forms and aesthetic principles, in Rancière's reading, is charged with political possibility since it diminishes the hierarchies that once determined "which subjects and forms of expression were deemed worthy of inclusion in the domain of a given art."[57] Equality is therefore a precondition of Rancière's aesthetic theory and he demonstrates this approach in *Aisthesis* through a selection of case studies – "scenes" – that undo notions of canonicity or high art, offering what he calls "a counter-history of 'artistic modernity'," in which artists like Loïe Fuller and Charlie Chaplin occupy a far more influential position in "the modernist paradigm" than Mondrian or Kandinsky.[58] The intense crossovers I map between literature and dance, traditionally differentiated within the hierarchy of the arts, as well as the crucially related hierarchy of gender, are enlivened by Rancière's insights into the emergence of new notions of art at particular historical moments. For instance, Fuller's 1893 performance of her serpentine dance, one of the key "scenes" Rancière discusses, accorded with a contemporary belief among certain poets that dance could "invent a new power of artifice" and "a new idea of fiction."[59] The interdisciplinary framework of this thesis is not retroactively imposed upon disparate texts, objects, and performances; rather, it shows how the cultural ferment of ideas and practices in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries stimulated crossovers between the arts, notably and profoundly, between literature and dance. As Daniel Albright recognises, "the arts themselves have no power to aggregate or to separate" and yet they "will gladly assume the poses of unity or diversity according to the desire of the artist or the thinker."[60]

In the course of my research, I have found that these exchanges became

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[55] Jacques Rancière, *Aisthesis: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art*, trans. Zakir Paul (London: Verso, 2013), xii.
[56] Ibid., x-xi.
[57] Rancière, *Aesthetics and its Discontents*, 10.
[58] Rancière, *Aisthesis*, xiii.
[59] Ibid., 96; 100.
[60] Daniel Albright, *Panaesthetics: On the Unity and Diversity of the Arts* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2014), 3-4.

particularly acute during the period that witnessed the movement we call modernism. Although some of the individuals this thesis considers had a profoundly ambivalent relationship with modernism, the ideas, practices, and works associated with this movement have provided me with vital points of reference for the materials discussed throughout, many of which were formulated as responses to or reactions against modernist projects. W. B. Yeats may have felt an opposition between the "ancient sect" of Irish myth and "that filthy modern tide" (*VP,* 611), but his own attitudes towards art often coincided directly with those of modernist pioneers such as Ezra Pound and Constantin Brancusi.[61] Modernist scholars have long been preoccupied with the difficult relationship between modernism and modernity, influentially critiqued with reference to the work of Theodor Adorno as a negative interplay between modernist aesthetics and mass culture.[62] Contrary narratives, such as the reading advanced in Andreas Huyssen's *After the Great Divide,* have formulated new ways of interpreting the cultural purposes of modernism and the historical avant-garde, showing how artists sought various ways to reintegrate their work into life praxis.[63] Indeed, for Sara Danius, the distinction Adorno draws is related to "a whole series of recurring dichotomies such as the opposition of art to society, of beauty to utility, of the organic to the mechanical, of aesthetic discourse to communicative discourse."[64] In this vein, my thesis will attempt to navigate away from these binaries, embracing the interdisciplinary outlook of the "new modernist studies," a field alert to the resonances between literature and the changing conditions wrought by modernity in areas including technology, industry, media, and entertainment.[65] Such work has sought to redistribute the emphases between high art and "lower" forms of cultural activity in order to show how modernism was intimately embroiled in the workings of history and culture.

One of the key terms that persists across these enquiries and informs my

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[61] See Jack Quin, "W. B. Yeats and the Sculpture of Brancusi," *International Yeats Studies* 2, issue 1 (November 2017): Article 4.

[62] Most influential in this regard was Adorno and Horkenheimer's analysis of the "culture industry" in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944). See Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkenheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 94-136.

[63] Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture and Postmodernism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986).

[64] Sara Danius, *The Senses of Modernism: Technology, Perception, and Aesthetics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), 7-8.

[65] Douglas Mao and Rebecca Walkowitz, "The New Modernist Studies," *PMLA* 123, no. 3 (May 2008): 737-748.

readings of Salome's dance and the choreographic imagination is that of movement. From the fin-de-siècle to the much-debated end of modernism, this period is marked by movements, advances, and reversals, such as those signalled by the title of the recent collection *Late Victorian into Modern*, which emphasises the "continuities" that bear out between 1880 and 1920, a period seen as "at once radically new and very old, as modern and archaic, as a beginning and a *fin*," in the words of Laura Marcus, Michèle Mendelssohn and Kirsten E. Shepherd-Barr.[66] Moreover, critical debates have long revolved around the question of modernism's status as a movement: its historical and cultural specificities; its periodization and geographies; the discrete schools, ideologies and movements – Futurism, *Imagisme*, Vorticism – that constitute its broader workings. As part of a growing scholarly interest in moving forms and bodies, the recent collection *Moving Modernisms* has reframed issues of regionalism, globalism, and scale, whilst probing into the complex relation between motion and emotion, which was radically affected by the dynamic new technologies of the twentieth century.[67] Modernism was also shaped by the spectre of immobility: the temporal and physical ruptures of war; inert, fragile and inelastic bodies; moments of stillness and silence in performance. An important subset of this broader academic field has included a direct interest in the moving (often dancing) bodies that permeate modernist texts, demonstrating, in Tim Armstrong's words, "a particular fascination with the limits of the body, either in terms of its mechanical functioning, its energy levels, or its abilities as a perceptual system."[68]

Indeed, literary studies and perhaps modernist studies particularly have been shaped by the turn to the body that has come to prominence across critical schools as diverse as phenomenology and cultural materialism, largely in the wake of the first volume of Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality*. Foucault's critique of the "repressive hypothesis" debunked longstanding assumptions about the place of sexuality in nineteenth-century Western societies, underscoring the "steady proliferation of discourses concerned with sex" during this period, rather than the regime of repression that has often been assumed.[69] Crucially, Foucault's approach

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[66] Laura Marcus, Michèle Mendelssohn and Kirsten E. Shepherd-Barr, eds., "Introduction," in *Late Victorian into Modern* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 1-2.
[67] David Bradshaw, Laura Marcus, and Rebecca Roach, eds., *Moving Modernisms: Motion, Technology, Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).
[68] Tim Armstrong, *Modernism, Technology and the Body: A Cultural Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 4-5.
[69] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume One*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Random House, 1978), 18.

opened up ways of conceptualising the body as a locus of knowledge and a site through which the dynamics of power are made visible. Although Foucault's positive interpretation of power has proved troubling for certain strands of feminist theory, it has also offered important strategies for thinking about how the body might be situated in relation to historical narratives and cultural apparatuses.[70] Moreover, Foucault's description of "the nineteenth-century homosexual" as "a personage, a past, a case history […] and a morphology" clarifies in the figure of Wilde, whose life and works have long been considered influential catalysts in the formation of sexual identities, and whose *Salomé* was often read through the paradigm of his sexuality, as demonstrated by its reception in England.[71]

Although there is a strong critical tradition pertaining to modernism and the body, dance has long been a neglected aspect of modernist studies. This is in spite of the many exchanges that occurred between artists of various disciplines as a result of modernism's collaborative spirit, reflected in the accounts of non-textual forms such as music, film, and painting by scholars in the field.[72] A number of recent studies have sought, speaking more broadly, to rethink modernism's vexed relationship with the body in terms of acting techniques and body training methods, philosophies of movement, and systems of notation.[73] "The battle between the word and the body," Olga Taxidou argues in her ground-breaking study *Modernism and Performance*, "is primarily fought through and on the body of the modernist performer." "The category of dance," she later suggests, "is crucial in most debates about the efficacy of the poetic word on stage and its relationship to the actor."[74] Locating the body's expressive power in its mute, precisely orchestrated movements, dance gave artists a means of challenging the (often gendered) Cartesian hierarchy of mind and body, forming new interplays between written and corporeal languages in dramatic performance. Yet although dance has occasionally been discussed in relation to

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[70] Teresa de Lauretis reformulates Foucault's concept of a "technology of sex" in *Technologies of Gender*. See also Irene Diamond and Lee Quinby, *Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance* (Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 1988); Margaret A. McLaren, *Feminism, Foucault and Embodied Subjectivity* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002).

[71] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 43.

[72] See, for example, Daniel Albright, *Untwisting the Serpent: Modernism in Music, Literature and Other Arts* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Daniel Albright, ed. *Modernism and Music: An Anthology of Sources* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2003); David Trotter, *Cinema and Modernism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007).

[73] Recent examples of this work include Carrie J. Preston, *Modernism's Mythic Pose: Gender, Genre, Solo Performance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[74] Olga Taxidou, *Modernism and Performance: Jarry to Brecht* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 5; 194.

broader assessments of twentieth-century performance, the rich reciprocal connections between literary modernism and choreography were not explored in detail until the publication of Susan Jones's *Literature, Modernism and Dance*. My approach is indebted to Jones's illuminating evaluation of the proximities formed between these arts in the twentieth century, which reveals how extensively modernist approaches to language, gender, and embodiment were shaped by the formal and aesthetic experiments of dancers. My research has also been informed by the larger claim her study makes: that we can learn much about dance and literature by reconfiguring the traditional hierarchies governing the arts, which in turn will illuminate new aspects of cultural history.[75]

Perhaps because Salome's dance has long been approached as a symbolic riddle, open to many meanings and interpretations, scholars have been somewhat reticent to delineate its importance to modernism and performance. It seems too slippery and unwieldy, and at points appears to vanish from works in which it might be initially glimpsed. Taxidou mentions Salome's dance in reference to Yeats's horrified fascination with the experimental productions of 1890s French theatre, but does not return to investigate its sustained impact on modernist productions.[76] Jones identifies traces of Wilde's and Mallarmé's Salomes in Yeats's plays for dancers, but terms his response to the Salome story "indirect," identifying a wider range of imaginative pressures on his drama.[77] In *Dancing Machines*, Felicia McCarren gives a short account of Wilde's *Salomé*, but frames it as merely another example of the modernist fascination with the figure of the dancer, rather than a formative model for later interventions.[78] Even Dierkes-Thrun, who places Salome at the centre of her important study, does not concentrate on the dance itself, relegating the performance to a secondary consideration in her exploration of Wilde's transgressive aesthetics and his influence on subsequent adaptations.[79] This thesis is therefore the first sustained account of Salome's dance in the context of the modern choreographic imagination. It reconsiders the role of this often-maligned muse in order to measure

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[75] Susan Jones, *Literature, Modernism and Dance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). Earlier work in the field included Felicia McCarren, *Dancing Machines: Choreographies of the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003); Amy Koritz, *Gendering Bodies/ Performing Art: Dance and Literature in Early Twentieth-Century British Culture* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1995); Teri A. Mester, *Movement and Modernism: Yeats, Eliot, Lawrence, Williams and Early Twentieth-Century Dance* (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 1997).
[76] Taxidou, *Modernism and Performance*, 6.
[77] Jones, *Literature, Modernism and Dance*, 34.
[78] McCarren, *Dancing Machines*, 72-73.
[79] Dierkes-Thrun, *Salome's Modernity*.

her potential for feminist revision and ground her in the cultures of modernism. Some of my case studies reformulate Salome's dance in obvious ways, while other writers negotiate her legacy more obliquely, even articulating the distance of their own projects from Wilde despite their clear interest in his veiled dancer.

♦ ♦ ♦

Dance emerged as a model for other forms of art and experience in the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and my approach to the idea of a choreographic imagination has been informed by a number of philosophical accounts of dance. By considering Salome's dance in both its literary and its choreographic contexts, I follow the lead of Amy Koritz in attempting to "make visible the role of dance in shaping, reinforcing, and resisting those developments in aesthetic practice and ideology in which both arts participated."[80] In his late work *Twilight of the Idols* (1889), Friedrich Nietzsche criticised his German precursors and contemporaries for what he perceived to be their lack of training in logic and graceful writing. He proposed that cognitive functions must be learned and practiced, much as the performer rehearses his or her choreography:

> [T]hinking has to be learned in the way dancing has to be learned, *as* a form of dancing. […] For dancing in any form cannot be divorced from a *noble education*, being able to dance with the feet, with concepts, with words: do I still have to say that one has to be able to dance with the pen – that writing has to be learned?[81]

For Nietzsche, dance ideally combines rhythmic fluency with corporeal dexterity. It performs, with the body, a progression of positions and movements that can be replicated by the philosophical mind, and again deployed in the act of writing. In his other works, Nietzsche also considers dance to be expressive of art's Dionysian elements, declaring in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) that a "whole symbolism of the body" was engaged by the Greek dithyramb; "the rhythmic motions of all the limbs of the body in the complete gesture of dance."[82] The dancer therefore stands as a

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[80] Koritz, *Gendering Bodies/ Performing Art*, 1.
[81] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols and The Anti-Christ*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 1990), 76-77.
[82] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy: Out of the Spirit of Music*, trans. Shaun Whiteside (London: Penguin, 1993), 21.

vivid, vital challenge to the "veil" of "Apolline consciousness," a veil of form that Nietzsche expects the Dionysian figure to destroy. It bears noting here that Nietzsche's conceptualising of the dancer as a force of expressive intensity resonates with depictions of Salome's dance as a monstrous and excessive performance, which threatens to pierce the veils that conceal her body – veils that "[hide] that Dionysian world from […] view."[83] Whereas Mallarmé, another key advocate of dance in the period, promoted the aesthetic beauty and formal grace of dance as kind of corporeal writing, Nietzsche admired the chaotic energies and physical struggles expressed by the dancer, rooted in a language of the body.[84]

There appears to be a tension between Nietzsche's understanding of the Dionysian dancer as an instrument of unrestrained energy and his call for writers to develop ways of thinking based on "a plan of instruction, a will to mastery."[85] Yet at the core of Nietzsche's theory of tragedy is a resolution of the conflict between Apollonian and Dionysian forces. Philosophers who think and write "as a form of dancing" might therefore embrace both the visceral freedom of Dionysian feeling and an Apollonian sense of ordered beauty. Modernist writers took much from Nietzsche's work, and his identification of dance as a model for intellectual labour is echoed, for example, in Ezra Pound's definition of *logopoeia*; "poetry that is akin to nothing but language, which is a dance of the intelligence amongst words and ideas and modification of ideas and characters."[86] As I show in this thesis, the dance of Salome allowed writers to consider the intimate connections between choreography and literary practice – the graceful rhythms of writing, as well as the poetics of dance. This phenomenon continued well beyond the traditional scope of the modernist period: the poet Jorie Graham described Salome as the central figure in her collection *Region of Unlikeness* (1991), claiming in an interview that she "write[s] until suddenly what felt opaque turned transparent," invoking Salome's dance as a metaphor for the paradoxes of poetic creation and that unsettling moment when the veil of language is pierced.[87]

While Nietzsche offers an important conceptual precedent for considering

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[83] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 21.
[84] Jones compares Mallarmé's and Nietzsche's responses to dance in *Literature, Modernism and Dance*, 45-69.
[85] Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 76.
[86] Ezra Pound, "A List of Books: Reviews of George S. Street, Frederick Manning, C. F. Keary, and 'Others'," *The Little Review* 4, no. 11 (1918): 57. The Modernist Journals Project.
[87] Jorie Graham, in Thomas Gardner, "An Interview with Jorie Graham," in *Regions of Unlikeness: Explaining Contemporary Poetry* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 217-218.

how dance was imagined as a model for writing, other theorists explored dance as an ideal example of the exchange between the spectator and the artwork. In his influential essay *Time and Free Will* (1889), Henri Bergson illustrates his theory of "aesthetic feeling" by examining how grace, specifically the grace of the dancer, elicits a sensory response from the spectator based on "the perception of ease in motion."[88] The apparently natural facility of the dancer's gestures gradually allows the viewer to anticipate the progress of the dance, creating the impression that the flow of time has been mastered:

> For the rhythm and measure, by allowing us to foresee to a still greater extent the movements of the dancer, make us believe that we now control them. As we guess almost the exact attitude which the dancer is going to take, he seems to obey us when he really takes it: the regularity of the rhythm establishes a kind of communication between him and us, and the periodic returns of the measure are like so many invisible threads by means of which we set in motion this imaginary puppet.[89]

For Bergson, the movements of the dancer allow the spectator to feel a sense of control: the pleasure derived from the perception of grace is rooted in a feeling of mastery, as the performance is predicted and contained by the spectator's imagination. Narratives dealing with relationships of domination, often between a male artist and a mechanised female body, can be found across nineteenth-century fiction; for instance, in E. T. A Hoffmann's *Der Sandman* (1816) and Auguste Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's *L'Eve Future* (1886), which tells of a scientist, the fictionalised Thomas Edison, creating automatons to replace the novel's "real" female characters. This interest in uncanny, automated, and subordinate bodies shaped the literary culture into which Wilde's *Salomé* emerged, reflected in the suggestions of hypnosis and predetermination that permeate his play.

As many critics have observed, women's bodies, especially on stage, were frequently presented as controllable and submissive objects, despite (or perhaps as a result of) the formation of political positions that opposed patriarchal conceptions of femininity, represented by figures such as the New Woman. While the reproductive and body-altering capacities of technology unseated the notion that women's bodies were the "last remaining site of redemptive nature," they also fed, according to Felski, "a patriarchal desire for technological mastery over woman, expressed in the fantasy

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[88] Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, trans. F. L. Pogson (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2001), 12.
[89] Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, 12.

of a compliant female automaton[.]"[90] Moreover, Felski observes that "[the] motif of the female performer easily lent itself to appropriation as a symptom of the pervasiveness of illusion and spectacle in the generation of modern forms of desire."[91] The Bergsonian dancer, as an "imaginary puppet," reflects the interest in machine-like bodies expressed in Heinrich von Kleist's seminal work *Über das marionettentheater* (*On the Marionette Theatre*, 1810), which shaped late nineteenth- and twentieth-century theories of acting and marionette performance, particularly for dramatists like Yeats, Maurice Maeterlinck, and Edward Gordon Craig. As I show throughout this thesis, dancing bodies importantly dramatised the tension between the performer's agency and the control of the choreographer or director, often represented through the image of the dancing puppet.

It is important to emphasise how transformative this period was for dancers and their work. "Every age," Baudelaire remarks in his essay "The Painter of Modern Life" (1863), "had its own gait, glance, and gesture."[92] Much of the critical debate regarding the relationship between dance and literary practice has returned to the importance of gesture. In his highly influential "Notes on Gesture," Giorgio Agamben traces the vexed relationship that developed between gestures and meaning in the late nineteenth century, which also shaped responses to dance. Exploring the extraordinary and painstaking account of physical gestures in the work of Gilles de la Tourette and Jean-Martin Charcot at the Salpêtrière hospital, Agamben perceives the development of a bodily economy in which apparently "everyone had lost control of their gestures, walking and gesticulating frenetically."[93] While new technologies such as the cinema recorded and altered perceptions of the body's visual language, they also fomented the conditions that led to this excess – and disintegration – of gestural meaning. "An era that has lost its gestures is, for that very reason," Agamben asserts, "obsessed with them."[94] Agamben's theorising of gesture is valuable to the connections this thesis maps between the languages of different art forms, which underwent critical formal change during this period of unstable or "lost" gestures. Indeed, dance, like cinema, for Agamben, was a crucial sphere of gestural

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[90] Felski, *The Gender of Modernity*, 19-20.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Charles Baudelaire, "The Painter of Modern Life," in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. by Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon Press, 1964), 14.
[93] Giorgio Agamben, "Notes on Gesture," in *Infancy and History: The Destruction of Experience*, trans. Liz Heron (London: Verso, 1993), 137.
[94] Ibid.

transformation: the choreographies of Isadora Duncan and Sergei Diaghilev appeared to signal "the headlong attempt to regain *in extremis* those lost gestures," opening up the possibility that dance might recover the lost connection between the human body and expression.[95]

Beyond the stage, dance had a strange second life in the choreographic tics, tremors, and vibrations observed in the bodies of patients at Charcot's Salpêtrière, and in the flickering movements of film. Moreover, changes in dance technique by modern dance pioneers and Ballets Russes choreographers at the turn-of-the-century, pursued, in Mark Franko's terms, "primitive, mechanical, or futuristic sources of movement innovation," which prioritised "expression" rather than "emotion" in performance.[96] According to Franko, this split between emotion and expression was symptomatic of aesthetic modernism's wider investment in "theatrical impersonality," a subject that certainly interested playwrights like Yeats and Beckett, who were anxious about the creative input of the actor.[97] Franko's account of modern dance practice provides a way of thinking about individual creativity that does not erase the agency of the performer within an account of depersonalisation, since Franko shows how dancers themselves cultivated an aesthetics of mechanisation and impersonality. Whereas "emotion" allowed the subjectivity of the dancer or actor to determine the body's gestures, "expression" replaced subjectivity with "presence," thereby privileging the moving body as an object in itself, rather than an emotive vessel.[98] In a similar vein, Jones has described how dancers in the Ballets Russes company struggled with Nijinsky's choreographies, which demanded "impersonality" and presented "the dancer as the medium of an abstract, formal aesthetic."[99] This concern with the constraints and freedoms accorded to the performer's body, theorized in the dramatic criticism of practitioners such as Craig, Yeats, and Meyerhold, pervades many of the texts and films explored in this thesis, and underpins the choreographic imagination to which Salome's dance was central.

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[95] Agamben, "Notes on Gesture," 138.
[96] Mark Franko, *Dancing Modernism/ Performing Politics* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), x-xi.
[97] Ibid., x.
[98] Ibid., x-xi.
[99] Jones, *Literature, Modernism, and Dance*, 10.

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Salome's dance, as both a symbol and a range of real enactments, tested the limits of what could and could not be represented in performance. Bergson's description of the relationship between dancer and spectator as one of imagined "control" is central to the writing on dance that emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century – through Mallarmé, Wilde, Yeats, and others. Salome gave this tension a focal point, as there were concerted, official attempts to control and censor her image, as well as revolts against this control by dancers who asserted their own creative agency in their solo work and their collaborations with playwrights and filmmakers. Dance itself poses a subtle challenge to external power, as its ephemerality resists the fixity of writing. As Salome's veils suggest, dance embodies the tension between representation and disappearance, performing what Gabriele Brandstetter describes as the "duality of dance on the one hand as a transitory art of the body […] and on the other as a culturally stable set of techniques for symbolic representation."[100] I trace the course of these corporeal tensions from Wilde to Beckett, exploring how the Salome narrative positioned the female dancer at the heart of the burgeoning relationship between choreography and literary modernism.

Chapter One focuses on Wilde's *Salomé*, tracing the author's interest in the aesthetic and formal concerns of Decadence and Symbolism alongside an emergent theatrical avant-garde. I argue that Wilde both absorbed and departed from earlier nineteenth-century approaches to Salome, demonstrating how his *Salomé* also engaged with theories of choreographed movement that were becoming increasingly central to the dramatic practices of Maurice Maeterlinck and Alfred Jarry, among others. While critics have often pronounced Salome's body to be a blank space within the text, or a stand-in for Wilde's homoerotic intentions, I argue that Wilde's play imaginatively construes a space for the body of the dancer, despite the qualities of disembodiment suggested by his play's Symbolist elements. To show how the realities of performance affected Wilde's dramatic vision, I explore Sarah Bernhardt's involvement with *Salomé*, suggesting that, although her plans to produce the work were cut short, she offers a critical model for later performers of Salome's role. Her uncorseted, freely moving, uncertainly gendered body imbued the figure of Salome

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[100] Gabriele Brandstetter, *Poetics of Dance: Body, Image, and Space in the Historical Avant-Gardes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 2.

with a vitally feminist conception of movement, which influenced a range of modern dancers who later turned to this role.

These dancers are at the heart of Chapter Two, which explores the place of Salome in the individual dance performances of women who chose her as a choreographic subject. Emphasising the connections between literary aesthetics and the development of modern dance, this chapter investigates how the performances of Loïe Fuller and Maud Allan reimagined Salome's body as an instrument for female self-fashioning, escaping a Symbolist tradition largely dominated by images of monstrous womanhood. Critiquing what Rancière describes as Fuller's "unlocatable body," I show how this dancer engineered her own physical displacement in order to recover a critical sense of her choreographic technique and individual authorship. I then turn to the work of her one-time pupil Maud Allan, who embraced the erotic orientalism associated with earlier versions of the myth through her *Vision of Salome* yet simultaneously created a space for the female spectator in her audience. Exploring the intimate connections between Salome's literary and choreographic forms after Wilde, this chapter shows how these distinct traditions came to affect each other at specific moments, thereby intervening in the trajectory of modernist writing and its relationship with dance.

In Chapter Three, I turn to Salome's cinematic forms, proposing new connections between Alla Nazimova's 1923 adaptation *Salomé: An Historical Phantasy by Oscar Wilde*, and the French director Germaine Dulac's choreographic approach to film aesthetics. Although Nazimova was once the highest paid actress in Hollywood, and a key figure in the development of the avant-garde in film, she has only recently begun to receive attention beyond silent film studies. Drawing together historical reviews and profiles of Nazimova as a performer, this chapter considers how she negotiated with the orientalist terms so often used to characterise her performances, suggesting that the role of Salome offered her a means of reclaiming the grounds on which her body had long been evaluated. Combining close interpretations of Nazimova's *Salomé* with a detailed explication of the relationship between dance and silent cinema – using Dulac's critical essays and abstract films –, I propose that Salome's dance was used by these artists to creatively engage with forms of movement rooted in and expressed by the female body, which took on new valences through the medium of film.

Returning to the theatre, Chapter Four concerns the place of Salome in

Yeats's dance-dramas, focusing on his use of dance in *At the Hawk's Well* (1916) and *The King of the Great Clock Tower* (1934). Considering Yeats's sceptical response to Wilde's *Salomé* in his letters and other writings, this chapter suggests that Yeats's fascination with dance was in fact an elemental part of his larger ambition for the theatre, shaped by his collaboration with the set designer Edward Gordon Craig, and his partnerships with the dancers Michio Ito and Ninette de Valois. I investigate Yeats's enduring focus on the dancer as a marionette-figure, considering his plays in the context of theories of the ideal performing body – advanced by dramaturgs like Craig – and concurrent experiments in dance. Far from a peripheral or incidental interest, I argue that Salome is at the centre of Yeats's rich and complex choreographic imagination, surfacing in his consistent reworking of the images of dancer and severed head. It is through this particular combination of images that Yeats expresses and adapts his ideas about the impersonality of the actor, permitting and even encouraging dancers to influence the form of his plays.

Such a relationship between impersonality and choreography is integral to Samuel Beckett's increasingly rigorous experiments in dramatic form. In my Coda, I map Salome's spectral appearances in Beckett's work, illustrating his imaginative roots in the aesthetic and formal concerns pertaining to dance that preoccupied many of Salome's earlier interpreters. I present my reflections on Beckett in a Coda because the nature of his engagement with Salome – tentative and, at times, opaque – requires a slightly different critical arrangement. I argue that although Salome is a more elusive presence for Beckett than she is for Fuller or Yeats, the veiled dance at the centre of her mythos manifests at specific moments across his work, from the choreographic metaphors of his first novel *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (1932), to the faceless peripatetics of the late dance play *Quad* (1981). The intertextual echoes in these works, combined with the lingering impact of Yeats's dance-dramas on Beckett's dramatic motivations, necessitated the latter's inclusion in this thesis from the outset. The bodiless heads and veiled dancers that permeate the dramatic texts of Yeats and Wilde return as the gatekeepers of the theatrical avant-garde across Beckett's corpus.

Although these writers and performers worked across different fields and contexts, their individual responses to Salome's dance reveal a recurring obsession across the spectrum of modernist writing and performance. It was important to me from the outset of this project to select case studies that gave equal weight to the creative energy of female performers during this period and the so-called canonical

male dramatists who were so struck by this narrative. Often, as I argue in my chapters on Yeats and Beckett in particular, these playwrights shaped their literary material around the realities of choreographic performance, enabled by their collaborations with certain dancers and actors. At the crux of this thesis is a desire to come to terms with literature's complex relationship with the body – with its movements, meanings, and communicative possibilities. Following the steps of Salome as she dances across nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature and culture allows us to understand one such history.

CHAPTER ONE
"That Invisible Dance": Oscar Wilde, Symbolism, and Salome's Forms

A copy of Wilde's *Salomé* in the original French, addressed to the artist Aubrey Beardsley, bears the following inscription in Wilde's hand: "For Aubrey: for the only artist who, besides myself, knows what the dance of the seven veils is, and can see that invisible dance."[1] Beardsley, a co-founder of the experimental and disreputable *Yellow Book*, provided the illustrations for the English version of Wilde's play, translated by Lord Alfred Douglas, which caused a stir upon its appearance in 1894.[2] Associated with this particular circle of men, the "invisible dance" Wilde evokes has often been read as a code for homosexual secrets; an ambiguous counterpart to the "love that dare not speak its name."[3] The notion of an invisible dance also, however, seems to render the body of the dancing woman a point of absence or lack. Readings of Salome's dance have, in this way, sometimes overwritten the gendered body of Salome by interpreting Wilde's dancer in psychoanalytic terms: Marjorie Garber, for instance, reads Salome as a transvestic figure, whose veils circumscribe the hidden phallus always apparently masked in Wilde's aesthetic system.[4] While this reading underscores *Salomé*'s undoubted homoeroticism, it figuratively reinserts a male presence into the space vacated by the dancer's body, thereby colluding in the erasure and mystification of the female form. As this chapter shows, Wilde's use of the term "invisible" can be differently construed as an acknowledgement of the puzzling opacity of the dance that ostensibly sits at the heart of his drama. It is a performance contingent on the use of multiple veils, and it resists, by its very nature, stable representation in visual or verbal terms. Showing how Wilde both adapted and departed from the Salome figures imagined in Symbolist and Decadent writing, this chapter explores the multiple ways in which Salome's "invisible dance" was imagined by Wilde and his contemporaries, rendering it a site of interpretive possibility for the

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[1] Oscar Wilde, *The Letters of Oscar Wilde*, ed. Rupert Hart-Davis (London: Rupert Hart-Davis Ltd., 1962), 348.

[2] For a textual history of the play, see Rodney Shewan, "Oscar Wilde's *Salomé*: A Critical Variorum Edition from Three Extant Manuscripts – Proofsheets and Two Early Printed Texts Transcribed in Parallel," Two Vols. (PhD Diss., University of Reading, 1982).

[3] Elliot L. Gilbert, "'Tumult of Images': Wilde, Beardsley and 'Salome'," *Victorian Studies* 26, no. 2 (Winter 1983): 133-159. Jason Boyd, "Staging the Page: Visibility and Invisibility in Oscar Wilde's Salome," *Nineteenth Century Theatre & Film* 35, no. 1 (2008): 17-47.

[4] Garber, *Vested Interests*, 338-46.

female body, and opening it up to later experiments in choreography and dramatic writing. For Katharine Worth, a dramatist like Wilde, an Irishman in Paris writing through the various strains of the theatrical avant-garde, was "holding out his hand across fifty years to Beckett," anticipating trends in performance that would take hold in the twentieth century.[5]

Following Rancière's strategy of using specific artistic events to uncover the working of his aesthetic regime, this chapter explores the conditions framing the first performance of *Salomé* in 1896, situating the production and its effects in relation to the dramatic practices and body cultures particular to this historical moment. Indeed, the year 1896 was bookended by two performances in Paris that were set to disturb the paradigms of theatrical practice and durably alter representations of the body on stage and screen. The first was *Salomé*, which premiered on 11 February at the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre in a production managed by Aurélien Marie Lugné-Poe. This came in the aftermath of the play's disastrous encounter with the English Lord Chamberlain and, stoking further controversy, Wilde's trials and incarceration. Lugné-Poe's production meant a good deal to Wilde, who believed it had "turned the scale in his favour," at least in terms of the treatment he received whilst imprisoned.[6] The year's second major theatrical event took place on 9 December, again under the auspices of Lugné-Poe's theatre company. Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi,* a provocative interpretation of *Macbeth* featuring puppet-like actors, had its *répétition générale*, a public dress rehearsal for critics, writers, and other privileged members of the artistic community.

Irreverent, blasphemous, parodic, obscene, these plays both engaged with and troubled existing methods of dramatic representation, drawing on Symbolist and avant-garde strategies of aesthetic estrangement, political critique, and sexual difference.[7] Although Wilde has often been characterised as a popular dramatist who sacrificed his political radicalism for commercial success,[8] *Salomé* marks a clear departure from his society comedies, given its debts to the more experimental facets of fin-de-siècle French drama, advanced by playwrights such as Jarry and Maurice

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[5] Katharine Worth, *The Irish Drama of Europe from Yeats to Beckett* (London: The Athlone Press, 1978) 99.

[6] Oscar Wilde to Alfred Douglas, (?) 2 June [1897], *Letters,* 588.

[7] For a detailed analysis of *Salomé*'s staging and reception see William Tydeman and Steven Price, *Wilde: Salome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). The historiography of Jarry's *Ubu Roi* is covered in detail in Thomas Postlewait's *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) 60-86.

[8] Sos Eltis challenges this particular characterisation of Wilde in *Revising Wilde: Society and Subversion in the Plays of Oscar Wilde* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

Maeterlinck. This chapter demonstrates the significance of Salome's dance of the seven veils to conceptual understandings of the relationship between performer and dramatist, read alongside the growing fascination with choreographed and mechanised bodies in the work of these authors.

Salome, as Wilde imagined her, emerged onto a stage already coming to terms with the changing cultural landscape of modernity, shaped by the rise of new technologies and forms of rhythm and movement. 1896 was also the year in which the Lumière brothers patented their *cinématographe*, and some of their earliest work includes recordings of serpentine dancers, illustrating the fervent hold that seemingly free and wild dancers had gained on the popular imagination.[9] Such technologies seemed to open up new possibilities for the human (or inhuman) body, transforming it into an object that could be reconstrued, re-captured, supplanted and supplemented by machines. As I show in this chapter, Salome, a seductively veiled and powerful female figure, also fuelled concerns about the legitimacy of fixed perceptions of the female body, and about the kind of exchanges that might occur between spectators and performers in the theatre. In Flaubert's version of the story, for instance, Salome's dance precipitates an alarming sensory response in her spectators, as "invisible sparks [shoot] out" from her body, "firing the men with excitement."[10] Transformed from a lustful and sensuous vision into something electrically charged, Salome's body stands at the permeable interstices of nineteenth-century aesthetic movements and the mechanised, volatile, determined impulses represented by new technologies and modern forms of desire.

"This Very Unattractive Tragedy": Wilde and Theatre at the Fin-de-Siècle

By the time *Salomé* premiered in February 1896, it had already given Wilde considerable trouble. The Lord Chamberlain had halted the London production of *Salomé* starring Sarah Bernhardt as a result of the play's religious subject matter; the ban on theatrical representations of biblical material was not lifted in England until

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[9] McCarren contemplates the cinematic responses to dance in *Dancing Machines*, 43-61.
[10] Gustave Flaubert, "Herodias," in *Three Tales*, trans. A. J. Krailsheimer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 102.

1931.[11] Edward Pigott, the London Examiner of Plays at the time, described *Salomé* as a "miracle of impudence," and articulated in florid terms his alarm at the Princess's necrophiliac demonstrations of desire for Iokanaan's severed head.[12] Beardsley's illustrations did little to ease the controversy surrounding the work. Populated by eunuchs, hermaphrodites, and other bodies in various states of exposure, Beardsley's drawings were interpreted as visual confirmation of what David Weir has called the "morbidly erotic strain" of Decadence, although their dark beauty was appreciated in some quarters.[13] In his autobiographical essay *The Trembling of the Veil* (1922), W. B. Yeats recalls telling Beardsley that he had never surpassed his depiction of Salome revelling before her capital prize; the artist allegedly responded, "Yes, yes; but beauty is so difficult."[14] It was certainly a difficult beauty that Wilde created in *Salomé*, as his play contributed to the iconography of violent sexuality associated with previous versions of this figure in art and literature.

Wilde's initial decision to compose his play in French strategically positioned him alongside the generation of French writers associated with the interconnected schools of Decadence and Symbolism, both of which adopted Salome as a muse. Accurately defining these movements is a difficult task, further complicated by the inconsistencies of their best-known theorist, the English critic Arthur Symons. In his seminal essay "The Decadent Movement in Literature" (1893), Symons termed Symbolism a mere "branch" of Decadence, with the latter "most precisely expressing the general sense of the newest movement in literature," a movement of "intense self-consciousness, a restless curiosity in research, an over-subtilising refinement upon refinement, a spiritual and moral perversity."[15] This defiantly morbid school found admirers beyond France, and Wilde was its most notable evangelist in the English language – a connection eagerly diagnosed by *Salomé*'s outraged detractors. By 1899, Symons had experienced a radical change of heart. In *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, he disparaged Decadence as a "straying aside from the main road of

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[11] Tydeman and Price, *Salome*, 93. For a comprehensive history of censorship laws and practices during this period, see John Russell Stephens, *The Censorship of English Drama, 1824-1901* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).
[12] Pigott quoted in Stephens, *Censorship*, 112.
[13] David Weir, *Decadence and the Making of Modernism* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995), 3. See also John Stokes ed., *Fin de siècle/ Fin du globe: Fears and Fantasies of the Late Nineteenth Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1992).
[14] W. B. Yeats, *The Trembling of the Veil*, in *Autobiographies,* ed. by William O' Donnell and Douglas N. Archibald, vol. 3 of *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats*, ed. Richard J. Finneran and George Mills Harper (New York: Scribner, 1999) 255.
[15] Arthur Symons, "The Decadent Movement in Literature" [1893], in *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, ed. Matthew Creasy (Manchester: Carcanet, 2014), 170.

literature," a "mock interlude […] [that] diverted the attention of the critics while something more serious was in preparation."[16] This more sober form was Symbolism, and it was, in Symons's opinion, grave and spiritual whereas Decadence encouraged only degeneracy – the sort that Wilde clearly embodied. Propagated by poets such as Arthur Rimbaud and Stéphane Mallarmé, Symbolism signalled "a revolt against exteriority, against rhetoric, against a materialistic tradition; in this endeavour to disengage the ultimate essence, the soul" of things.[17] Firmly opposed to realism and Romanticism, it sought, through symbols, to grant literature "its authentic speech."[18]

Symons's reversals and qualifications in his later essay blur any straightforward distinction between these movements, compounded by the fact that he discusses a number of the same writers in both works, including Verlaine, Mallarmé, and Huysmans, all of whom were fascinated by Salome. While the historic entanglements of their coteries have often led to the conflation of these terms, they were subsequently taken up in alternative ways, with Symbolism emerging as a more dominant "theory" while Decadence endured a lesser status as a "mood."[19] Both, however, were central to the novel projects of modernism, and to the work that Wilde produced in the 1890s. His subtle elisions between the words "*Décadents*" and "*Symbolistes*" in the revisions of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) mark, in Sherry's reading, their potent interchangeability while apparently masking the former's scandalous significance.[20] Indeed, it was in the wake of Wilde's imprisonment and the very public prosecution of Decadent sensibilities that Symons shifted his allegiance to Symbolism. *Salomé*, Wilde's clearest nod to nineteenth-century French literary forms, traced the contours of these aesthetic variations and continuities. It is no surprise that Symons himself reworked Wilde's themes in his poem "The Dance of the Daughters of Herodias" (1897) and his cycle *Studies in Strange Sins* (1923), inspired by Beardsley's art.[21]

The outraged responses to *Salomé* in England, if not in France, were hardly

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[16] Symons, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, 7.
[17] Ibid., 8.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Patrick McGuinness draws this distinction in his introduction to *Symbolism, Decadence, and the Fin de Siècle: French and European Perspectives*, ed. Patrick McGuiness (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000), 1-3.
[20] Sherry, *Modernism and the Reinvention of Decadence*, 9.
[21] Arthur Symons, *Selected Writings*, ed. Roger Holdsworth (Manchester: Carcanet, 2003), 54; 66.

surprising given the position its author occupied in the eyes of the public.[22] As Pamela Thurschwell has observed, during Wilde's trials in 1895, his sexuality was used to interpret and decode his writing. Characterised as "a monster of influence," Wilde and his works were thought to be "dangerously influential and contaminating."[23] Even prior to this scandal, newspapers had responded to *Salomé* with palpable fear and disgust, as demonstrated in this 1894 review of the English text, which Wilde had dedicated to Lord Alfred Douglas:

> To our thinking this very unattractive tragedy is even less attractive in its English rendering than it was in the original French. As for the illustrations by Mr. Aubrey Beardsley we hardly know what to say of them. They are fantastic, grotesque, unintelligible for the most part, and, so far as they are intelligible, repulsive. They would seem to represent the manners of Judaea as conceived by Mr. Oscar Wilde portrayed in the style of Japanese grotesque as conceived by a French *décadent*. The whole thing must be a joke, and it seems to us a very poor joke.[24]

A lack of comprehension appears to be at the heart of this reviewer's unease, suggesting that the style of Wilde's play obscured its equally repulsive content. Tropes associated with French (and loosely "subversive") literature, signalled by the term Decadence, render the work "unintelligible" in the main, disclosing only dissident meanings when any meaning is disclosed at all. This reviewer's fervent interpretation of the play's elliptical qualities betrays an underlying anxiety about the capacities of language to veil unorthodox desires, particularly in terms of sexuality. Wilde's interest in masks and veils was read against him during his trial, a rhetorical strategy repeated at Maud Allan's libel suit decades later, as I show in Chapter Two.[25] The eagerness of moral interpreters to produce and unmask such meanings aligns with Foucault's theorising of nineteenth-century sexual discourses as multiple, diverse, and articulate, rather than non-existent. What has conventionally been understood as a Victorian repression of sex, Foucault argues, can be more properly explained as a vocal interpretation of the silences governing sexuality: an eager deciphering of "the love that dare not speak its name" in the courthouses and press offices.[26]

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[22] Adolphe Retté claims that, in Paris, "not a single one of [Wilde's] friends disowned him." See "Salomé," in *Oscar Wilde: Interviews and Recollections*, vol. 1, ed. E. H. Mikhail (London: The Macmillan Press, 1979), 191.

[23] Pamela Thurschwell, *Literature, Technology and Magical Thinking, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001)*,* 9.

[24] "We noticed Mr. Oscar Wilde's 'Salome'," *The Times*, March 8, 1894, ProQuest.

[25] Regenia Gagnier, *Idylls of the Marketplace: Oscar Wilde and the Victorian Public* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1987), 146.

[26] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 17-49.

Salome's body, and her dance in particular, operated as a locus for these anxieties, as Charles Bernheimer has demonstrated.[27] If Wilde was capable of spreading his perceived immorality, *Salomé* was seen as a vessel for such deviant communications, strengthened by the cultural legacy of his muse. Depictions of Salome in late nineteenth-century art coupled her virginal naivety with insatiable lust, aligning her with other sexually powerful women such as Cleopatra and Judith.[28] Moreau's *The Apparition* (1876-77) clearly demonstrates these qualities, embracing "the iconography of Salome as headhunter" with its sensuous coupling of a near-naked Salome and the elevated, hypnotic head of John the Baptist (Fig. 1).[29] Huysmans's novel *Against Nature*, "the breviary of the decadence"[30] eagerly read by Wilde's Dorian Gray, records this very painting sending the aesthete Des Esseintes into raptures as he revels in the horror of Salome's beauty:

> She became, in a sense, the symbolic deity of indestructible Lechery, the goddess of immortal Hysteria, the accursed Beauty singled out from all others by the cataleptic paroxysm that stiffens her flesh and hardens her muscles; the monstrous, indiscriminate, irresponsible, unfeeling Beast who, like the Helen of antiquity, poisons everything that comes near her, everything that sees her, everything that she touches.[31]

In the character of Des Esseintes, "we see," according to Symons, "the sensations and ideas of the effeminate, over-civilised, deliberately abnormal creature who is […] partly the father, partly the offspring, of the perverse art that he adores."[32] While Decadent men were often regarded as queerly feminine, the women they depicted were imbued with an unnatural masculinity, writ large in their libidinous gazes and imposing sexual presence. Dominant and pitiless, Huysmans's Salome can be placed

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[27] Bernheimer considers Salome in relation to anxieties about the corrosive influence of Decadence in *Decadent Subjects: The Idea of Decadence in Art, Literature, Philosophy, and Culture of the Fin-de-Siècle in Europe* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2002), 104-138.

[28] Edouard Toudouze's *Salome Triumphant* (1886) is an important example. His Salome is young and coquettish but her gaze is directed resolutely at the viewer, with her legs suggestively parted and John's severed head emanating an ecstatic light at her feet. Notable representations of Judith and Cleopatra in nineteenth and twentieth-century art include Gustave Klimt's *Judith and Holofernes* (1901), Benjamin-Constant's *Judith* (c. 1885), John William Waterhouse's *Cleopatra* (1887), and Mosè Bianchi's *Cleopatra II* (1890).

[29] Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity*, 382.

[30] Symons, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, 73.

[31] Joris-Karl Huysmans, *Against Nature*, trans. Nicholas White (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 46.

[32] Symons, "The Decadent Movement in Literature," 180.

Gustave Moreau, *The Apparition* (1876-77). Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum, Bequest of Grenville L. Winthrop.

in dialogue with the broader cultural constructions of female bodies as sites of sexual ambiguity, perversion, and neuroses. In the above passage, as the "goddess of immortal Hysteria," Salome also reflects the nineteenth-century female hysterics treated by Jean-Martin Charcot at the Salpêtrière. Surviving photographs capture these scantily-clad women in erotic poses, reflecting the peculiar eagerness with which they were exposed to eager audiences during Charcot's Tuesday lectures.[33] The manner in which the muscles of Huysmans's Salome stiffen and harden even mirrors Charcot's practice of casting the bodies of his hysterics in wax, preserving their rigid, contorted forms in aesthetic moulds.[34] Furthermore, Huysmans's pathologically inflected language anticipates the appalled phrasing of the Examiner of Plays, who expressed his disgust at Salome's climactic "paroxysm of sexual despair" before the severed head of Iokanaan.[35] Figured as a hypnotic and hypnotised subject, transfixed by the grotesque object of her desire, Salome is resolutely bound up in strategies for staging the female body across the period's medical and artistic cultures, and the resulting anxieties about the contaminating effects of witnessing such performances.

Salome was clearly associated with the possible dangers of hysteria and enchantment, stimulated by the "misogynistic revery" of writers like Huysmans.[36] In *Against Nature*, Moreau's painting is used to invoke the dancer's body, not as a source of transformative female creativity, but as a stiffly sculpted *femme fatale*, whose powerful desires are ultimately subsumed by the ecstasy of the male aesthete. These Symbolist Salomes proliferated during this period, and Yeats, immersed in the cultural climate of fin-de-siècle Paris, described his own desire to create "some Herodiade of our theatre, dancing seemingly alone in her narrow moving luminous circle."[37] Reflecting on the creative imperatives of the period, Yeats saw Salome as emblematic of a particular set of ideals and practices, "separate from everything heterogeneous and casual, from all character and circumstance."[38] His understanding of Salome's place in the Symbolist imagination was shaped by his friendship with Symons, who

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[33] According to Foucault, Charcot's institution was "a machinery for incitement, with its public presentations, its theatre of ritual crises" and his strategies for presenting the female body combined sexual and neurological discourses; see *History of Sexuality*, 55-56. For further discussion of Charcot see Janet L. Beizer, *Ventriloquised Bodies: Narratives of Hysteria in Nineteenth-Century France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994).

[34] Beizer connects Charcot's practice to a scene in Rachilde's novel *Monsieur Vénus* (1899), in which the artist Raoule creates a wax effigy of her (ambiguously gendered) lover Jacques; *Ventriloquised Bodies*, 254. In a Salomean act of necrophilia, Raoule kisses the model's lips at night.

[35] Pigott, quoted in Stephens, *Censorship*, 112.

[36] Meltzer, *The Dance of Writing*, 24.

[37] Yeats, *The Trembling of the Veil*, 247.

[38] Ibid.

recited to him the poetry of Verlaine and Mallarmé, apparently to great effect. "My thoughts gained in richness and in clearness from his sympathy, nor shall I ever know how much my practice and theory owe to the passages that he read me," mused Yeats, describing the lingering impact of Symbolist poetics on his own dramatic philosophy, and also undoubtedly on the Salome-themed plays for dancers he wrote in the 1930s.[39] As Yeats's reflections suggest, Salome, or "Herodiade," was an elemental symbol for the aesthetic movements of the late nineteenth century.

In Wilde's play, however, Salome was ostensibly freed from the catalepsy of Huysmans's and Moreau's visions as she was transferred to the mobile arena of the stage. Tracing Wilde's numerous influences and models for the Salome myth, scholars including Rodney Shewan and Joseph Donohue have debated about the extent to which Wilde's play was originally meant for the theatre. Robert Ross's opinion that the dance of the seven veils disrupted the "dramatic unity of the play" has stimulated suggestions that Wilde may have been writing in the relatively obscure tradition of the closet drama – a form of "reading drama" with which Mallarmé's *Hérodiade* is often associated.[40] Explicating the ambiguities inherent in *Salomé*'s staging requirements, Donohue has detailed the "tensions rampant in the period between the notion of a pure, unsullied, 'perfect' kind of drama […] and a more material, contingent kind of theatre intended for both eye and ear."[41] Wilde was working in the midst of these shifting literary and dramatic cultures, and his extensive work as a playwright, coupled with his early attempts to secure a theatre to stage his *Salomé*, do imply that he was deeply interested in the possibilities of producing this play with real performers before a watching audience. Although Wilde certainly drew on the heady, portentous visions offered by earlier interpreters of Salome's story, his play can also be read as a negotiation with the performance cultures and theatrical experiments of the fin-de-siècle, as, unlike these earlier examples, it implicitly welcomed the prospect of staging, and therefore sought to grant Salome a real body.[42] Read along these lines, Wilde's *Salomé* becomes a timely reflection on the period's obsession with dancers, and other choreographed and mobile bodies.

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[39] Yeats, *The Trembling of the Veil*, 246.

[40] Martin Puchner, *Stagefright: Modernism, Anti-Theatricality and Drama* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2002), 21.

[41] Joseph Donohue, "Salomé: Drame en un Acte: Introduction," in *PI*, 391.

[42] Jane Marcus argues that while Wilde may have been "inspired" by Decadents like Moreau, "he refused to worship them" and his play "de-mystifies the image [of Salome]." See Marcus, "Salomé: The Jewish Princess was a New Woman," *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* 78, no. 1 (1974): 99; 96.

Furthermore, Wilde thought in detail about what a performance of *Salomé* might constitute. The performance histories of *Salomé*, and the artistic loyalties of the institutions affiliated with Wilde's play, reveal much about the aesthetic and formal conditions framing her dance. Between its composition in 1891 and its eventual production in Paris in 1896, *Salomé* endured a difficult route to the stage. Even prior to Bernhardt's failed attempt to bring the play to London, Wilde and his friend Charles Ricketts originally planned a French production, together conceiving an ornate, immersive theatrical experience with the different groups of characters visually designated by bright blocks of colour, and a "rich turquoise" sky "cut by the perpendicular fall of gilded strips of Japanese matting forming an aerial tint above the terraces."[43] These plans did not come to fruition, although Ricketts did later stage *Salomé* at the King's Hall, Covent Garden in 1906. It was therefore left to Lugné-Poe to unveil Wilde's play for the first time at his Théâtre de l'Oeuvre, an independent theatre founded in 1893 with the objective of staging works perceived as experimental or provocative; criteria that Wilde's play certainly satisfied.

The Théâtre de l'Oeuvre was one of a number of theatres in Paris that provided a space for Symbolism's dramatic projects: Paul Fort's Théâtre d'Art was another, and it had briefly been attached to a possible production of *Salomé* prior to Lugné-Poe.[44] In 1891, the Théâtre d'Art had staged Maurice Maeterlinck's *L'Intruse* (*The Intruder*, 1890) and *Les Aveugles* (*The Blind*, 1890), introducing the Belgian playwright's concept of "static theatre" to Parisian audiences.[45] Providential forces and uncertain boundaries shadowed Maeterlinck's plays – works populated by marionette-like characters that revealed the dramatist's ambition to turn the actor's body into a controllable stage element. A key figure in the theorisation of performance, Maeterlinck's approach to the acting body influenced a range of practitioners from Jarry to Yeats and Edward Gordon Craig, all of whom differently incorporated aspects of his thinking into their dramatic systems. Patrick McGuinness has observed that Maeterlinck saw the body as a "rogue by-product, a kind of uncleansable residue in the process of performance," yet he turned these anxieties into a coherent dramatic philosophy, suggesting that marionettes, or performers mimicking marionette behaviours, might remedy the issue of individual agency,

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[43] Charles Ricketts, *Recollections of Oscar Wilde* (London: Pallas Athene Arts, 2011), 53.
[44] Tydeman and Price, *Wilde: Salome*, 26.
[45] Maeterlinck elaborated on his concept of the "static theatre" in his essay "The Tragic in Daily Life" (1896). See *The Treasure of the Humble*, trans. Alfred Sutro (London: George Allen, 1903), 95-121.

enhancing the authority of the playwright.[46] This approach to the dynamic between performer and dramatist reflected and cultivated broader thinking about choreographed movements, technologically-affected bodies, and the relationship between acting and free will.

Although the prophetic tones and Symbolist register of *Salomé* seem to reflect Maeterlinck's work, Lugné-Poe's theatre was not as strictly invested in the Symbolist agenda as the Théâtre d'Art. After Fort's purist loyalty to Symbolism led to his institution's ruin, Lugné-Poe took a less faithful but more productive approach.[47] His production of *Salomé* handled some of the play's more controversial material through a tactics of evasion. For instance, Lugné-Poe cast the Page of Herodias, who utters the play's most famously homoerotic line, as a woman (Suzanne Després) and thereby avoided creating further scandal in the wake of Wilde's trial.[48] It is also significant that the play was quietly rehearsed and barely promoted, suggesting that the director was keen to resist both a theatrical controversy, and the very real threat of censorship, which had already put paid to efforts to stage the play in England. It is difficult to ascertain how the dance of the seven veils was performed by Lina Munte, although Jean de Tinan's celebration of her role as "more beautiful and more terrible than [Wilde] had imagined" suggests that her Salome was invested with the qualities of horror and awe embodied by Mallarmé's Herodiade.[49] Receiving a mixed critical response, this 1896 production of *Salomé* nonetheless integrated Wilde's play into the French theatrical culture of the fin-de-siècle, alluding to parallels between his work and the radical theatres of Maeterlinck and Jarry.

The thematic and stylistic overlaps between these dramatists are striking, particularly in terms of their attitudes towards corporeality in performance. Jarry's *Ubu Roi*, also first produced by Lugné-Poe in 1896, has long been considered a pivotal moment for the avant-garde, when a proto-modernist theatre emerged, raging with expletives, from the vestiges of the dramatic tradition. Allegedly, a riot broke out amongst members of the audience following the provocative scatalogical opening line: "Merdre!" Competing accounts of the play's reception and staging have created some dispute as to what actually occurred at the two performances on 9 and 10

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[46] Patrick McGuinness, *Maurice Maeterlinck and the Making of Modern Theatre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 113.

[47] Tydeman and Price, *Wilde: Salome*, 26.

[48] Ibid., 29. The line "He was my brother, and nearer to me than a brother" (*PI*, 715) has been read as the clearest suggestion of a homosexual desire between the Page and the Syrian Captain.

[49] Jean de Tinan, quoted in Tydeman and Price, *Wilde: Salome*, 30.

December 1896. Some of the confusion regarding the extent of the public outcry originates from Yeats's account of watching *Ubu Roi* in *The Trembling of the Veil*, which he composed and published decades after the event:

> The audience shake their fists at one another, and the Rhymer whispers to me, "There are often duels after these performances," and he explains to me what is happening on stage. […] I am very sad, for comedy, objectivity, has displayed its growing power once more.[50]

Yeats acknowledges the possible imprecision of his account, admitting that "many pictures come before me without date or order."[51] Thomas Postlewait has outlined the historiographical complexities of *Ubu Roi*, and has identified a tendency amongst scholars to use this premiere as a key example of avant-garde rebellion, without fully accounting for the existing conditions that fomented such a work.[52] Maeterlinck's "static theatre," for instance, had previously dramatized the uncanny subjects and mechanistic performance techniques deployed by Jarry, and Maurice Bouchor's *Petit Théâtre des Marionettes* extolled the virtues of puppetry. Importantly, Wilde's *Salomé* had been staged at the same theatre ten months earlier, paving the way for Jarry's bodily grotesquerie and experimental style. Yeats likely attended the *répétition générale* rather than the premiere, and the makeup of the audience, with its diverse vested interests and critical biases, made controversy inevitable, which was ultimately what Jarry worked for as a playwright, designer, and director. As Günter Berghaus has pointed out, Jarry's utter disdain for bourgeois values meant that *Ubu Roi* was largely conceived of as "a dynamite thrown at an audience who visited play-houses only to parade their dresses and jewels."[53]

Putting aside its possible imprecisions, Yeats's account of *Ubu Roi* does capture the broader sense that this performance, like Wilde's *Salomé*, was a critical moment in theatre history. The fin-de-siècle stage was not usually a space for such radical experimentation. As Berghaus explains, it was largely controlled by commercial motivations, "concerned with trivial histrionic displays, bound by moribund conventions, and exploited by financial speculators."[54] In both form and

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[50] Yeats, *The Trembling of the Veil*, 266.
[51] Ibid., 264.
[52] Postlewait, "Cultural Histories: The Case of Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi*," in *Theatre Historiography*, 60-86.
[53] See Günter Berghaus's account of *Ubu Roi* in *Theatre, Performance, and the Historical Avant-Garde* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) 46-50; 48.
[54] Ibid., 48.

content, Jarry's play refused to conform to this system, much as Wilde's *Salomé* was a seeming anomaly in the context of his popular dramatic oeuvre. Yeats appears to have been less disturbed by the profanities of *Ubu Roi*'s dialogue than by the methods of performance, which included players dressed as overgrown puppets; in his words, "dolls, toys, marionettes, and now they are all hopping like wooden frogs." In these jerky, unnatural movements, Yeats discerns the loss of a human aspect, figured as a postlapsarian fall from grace:

> After Stéphane Mallarmé, after Paul Verlaine, after Gustave Moreau, after Puvis de Chavannes, after our own verse, after all our subtle colour and nervous rhythm, after the faint mixed tints of Conder, what more is possible? After us the Savage God.[55]

This famous passage reveals Yeats coming to terms with the sight of the dramatic tradition passed, in Taxidou's words, "through the modernist shredder."[56] The formal beauty and weary spiritualism associated with Symbolism was threatened by the radical, aggressive creatures populating the modernist stage, which looked towards the machine worship of later writers such as F. T. Marinetti and Wyndham Lewis. The shifting performance cultures brought into relief by the two key premieres of 1896 show that Wilde's Salome dancer was not merely a composite of Symbolist fantasies, as Zagona and others have suggested, but a figure also rooted in radical theatre practices and modern approaches to the moving body on stage. The controversial receptions accorded to Wilde and Jarry's works, and their shared history at Lugné-Poe's Théâtre de l'Oeuvre, drew them into proximity at a particularly fertile moment for the theatre, as did their adjacent interests in marionettes and choreographed movements.

Proto-Modernist Puppets, from Kleist to Wilde

If *Salomé* and *Ubu Roi* unsettled traditional means of representing the body on stage, they also pioneered new crossovers between different performance cultures and art forms: dance, puppetry, music, painting, and poetic drama. Jarry, like Mallarmé, Valéry, and Wilde, was an influential theorist of dance, although he spurned the image

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[55] Yeats, *The Trembling of the Veil*, 266.
[56] Taxidou, *Modernism and Performance*, 2.

of the graceful female ballerina celebrated by Mallarmé, and sought instead to carve a new place for the athletic male dancer on stage, an aim later realised by Diaghilev and Nijinsky at the Ballets Russes.[57] In this way, Jarry perhaps anticipated the rejection of ballet by Wyndham Lewis and Ezra Pound, for whom it represented, according to Jones, "a decadent romanticism that privileged the ethereal illusion and voyeuristic eroticism associated with the spectacle of the ballerina."[58] The bodily registers of *Salomé* and *Ubu Roi* differently confronted the status of the actor, integrating notions of control and philosophical determinism into their fictive contexts. In this vein, Salome's dance, across its many iterations, posed a challenge to male control over the performing female body, offering an image of the female dancer as, not so much a sylph-like ballerina, but a desiring, autonomous body, whose dance exceeds the frames of language, gender, and mimetic representation. As such, Wilde's understanding of nineteenth-century approaches to performance and choreographed movement provide an important context for reading Salome's dance.

These approaches have a textual heritage dating back to the early nineteenth century. As many scholars have observed, Kleist's essay *On the Marionette Theatre* offered a vital theoretical model for modernist responses to dance and puppetry: Wilde, Yeats, and Beckett were all familiar with the work, and incorporated some of Kleist's ideas about grace and movement into their dramatic systems.[59] In his seminal essay, Kleist writes that pure "grace" and freedom of movement are only possible for a form which either has "no consciousness at all – or has infinite consciousness – that is, in the mechanical puppet or in the god."[60] The uncanny capacities and movements of the puppet seem at times to surpass the skills of the human actor: as Kleist speculates, "a marionette constructed by a craftsman according to his requirements could perform a dance that neither he [the dancer] nor any other outstanding dancer […] could equal."[61] The physical flexibility and controlled nature of the puppet rendered it, in some ways, an ideal dancer, reflecting the themes of mechanical behaviour and external power governing the conditions of Salome's dance in Wilde's

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[57] See Jill Fell, "Dancing under their own gaze: Mallarmé, Jarry, and Valéry," *Journal of European Studies* 24 (1999): 133-155.

[58] Jones, *Literature, Modernism and Dance*, 8.

[59] See Emilie Morin, "Theatres and Pathologies of Silence: Symbolism and Irish Drama from Maeterlinck to Beckett," in *Silence in Modern Irish Literature*, ed. Michael McAteer (Leiden; Boston: Brill-Rodopi, 2017), 35-48; Anthony Paraskeva, "Beckett, Biomechanics, and Eisenstein's Reading of Kleist's Marionettes," *Journal of Beckett Studies* 22 (2013): 161-179.

[60] Heinrich von Kleist, "On the Marionette Theatre," trans. Thomas G. Neumiller *TDR* 16, no. 3 (1972): 26.

[61] Ibid., 23.

play. "In spite of the apparent gulf between the breathless, fabricated matter of puppets and the living bodies of dancers," Carrie Preston has argued that choreographers and directors across the theatrical avant-garde, following in the wake of Kleist, believed that marionettes might allow them to "perfect human movement."[62]

This conception of the marionette as a manipulable, superhuman object partly explains its lingering appeal for modernist writers; as Preston articulates, "Modernism's dancing marionettes position a soul and godlike gestural power at the interface between human and machine."[63] Perhaps Yeats had Kleist's figuration in mind when he identified Jarry's puppet-actors as savage deities, although his terms clearly trouble the distinction between nonsentience and omnipotence Kleist draws in comparing the puppet to the god. Nietzsche's proclamation of the death of God, which Dierkes-Thrun identifies as a crucial philosophical rationale for *Salomé's* "apocalyptic" elements, also paved the way for Yeats's response to Jarry's puppets.[64] Yet woven into this anxiety about the marionette's acting capabilities is a desire to retain the hierarchy positioning the playwright above the actor. "The puppet," Taxidou claims, "is conscripted into the argument that tries to maintain the power of the playwright. It becomes the purest form of mediation for the playwright's voice."[65] In his biography of Wilde, Richard Ellmann suggests that Wilde, who initially believed the actor to be of equal importance to the playwright, decided upon the dramatist's superiority once he was writing plays himself.[66] Wilde, however, had a complex reaction to the figure of the marionette, informed by his meditations on performance and free will, which he contemplated at various moments across his creative works and essays. This tension would prove central to both Wilde's dancing Salome and incarnations of this figure in later plays and dance performances.

In his poem "The Harlot's House" (1882), Wilde explicitly summons the image of the marionette to explore the kind of fatalist conditions that frame Salome's dance. Identifying the titular harlot with the marionette, Wilde suggests an intimate correspondence between sexual currency and the dance of the puppet, with its automatic bodily manners:

[62] Carrie J. Preston, "Modernism's Dancing Marionettes: Oskar Schlemmer, Michel Fokine, and Ito Michio," *Modernist Cultures* 9 (2014): 116.
[63] Ibid., 130.
[64] Dierkes-Thrun, *Salome's Modernity*, 47.
[65] Taxidou, *Modernism and Performance*, 17.
[66] Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde*, 349.

Sometimes a clockwork puppet pressed
A phantom lover to her breast,
Sometimes they seemed to try to sing.

Sometimes a horrible marionette
Came out, and smoked its cigarette
Upon the steps like a live thing.

(*CW*, 867)

These automatons mimic the gestures of living bodies; their cold, clockwork forms initiating grotesque performances of human desire. Wilde grounds these bodily motions in the language of choreography from the opening lines: "We caught the tread of dancing feet, / We loitered down the moonlit street" (*CW*, 867). The simple rhyme proposes a visual symmetry between the dancing body and the moon, a pairing that anticipates the imagistic register of *Salomé* with its insistent suggestions of lunar influence. Significantly, Wilde's marionettes are not solid machines but spectral apparitions – "phantom[s]," "slim silhouetted skeletons," "shadows" (*CW*, 867) – which are more redolent of Eastern shadow-puppet theatres such as the *ombres chinoises* than hand or wooden puppetry.[67] As a range of scholars have detailed, Salome was resolutely bound up in the widespread fetishising of the Orient that can be traced through the work of writers such as Flaubert and André Gide – an aesthetic strategy that pits the dancing oriental body against the power of the colonising gaze.[68] These forms of control are drawn out in Althea Gyles's illustrations for a 1904 version of "The Harlot's House," in which she uses the shadow-puppet theatre to frame her images of ghostly bodies. While a number of these figures are female dancers, imitating the poses of Botticelli's dancing Graces in his *Primavera*, the others are skeletons, attempting to violently control the dancers using long wires and nets (Fig. 2).

Wilde's poetic formulation of dancers as viciously subjugated performers necessarily affects any critical response to *Salomé*, which has been read in different terms as creating "a utopian opening for human agency."[69] Certainly, "The Harlot's House" suggests a crisis of autonomy underpinning the dancer's movements, and it

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[67] Harold B. Segel discusses the *ombres chinoises* and modernist responses to puppetry in *Pinocchio's Progeny: Puppets, Marionettes, Automatons, and Robots in Modernist and Avant-Garde Drama* (London: John Hopkins University Press, 1995).

[68] See Yeeyon Im, "Oscar Wilde's *Salomé*: Disorienting Orientalism," *Comparative Drama* 45, no. 4 (2011): 361-380; Ian Christopher Fletcher, "The Soul of Man under Imperialism: Oscar Wilde, Race, and Empire," *Journal of Victorian Culture* 5, no. 2 (2000): 334-341.

[69] Dierkes-Thrun, *Salome's Modernity*, 48.

© The British Library Board. *The Harlot's House: A Poem by Oscar Wilde; with Five Illustrations by Althea Gyles.* London: Mathurin Press, 1904.

is perhaps the struggle for individual agency rather than its realisation that illuminates the dynamics of Salome's dance, and the play's wider approaches to creativity and control. As I have previously shown, dance was philosophically construed across the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries as, on the one hand, emblematic of Dionysian oneness and vitality; and one the other, as a graceful fulfilment of the spectator's controlling impulses. These conceptual tensions shed a light on Wilde's understanding of choreographed movement. Elsewhere, he discusses the benefits of using mechanical performers who entirely conform to the will of the dramatist; for instance, in this 1892 letter to *The Daily Telegraph*, Wilde describes his delight at Maurice Bouchor's puppet version of *The Tempest*, suggesting that marionettes might prove to be ideal actors:

> There are many advantages in puppets. They never argue. They have no crude views about art. They have no private lives. We are never bothered by accounts of their virtues, or bored by recitals of their vices; and when they are out of an engagement they never do good in public or save people from drowning, nor do they speak more than is set down for them. They recognise the presiding intellect of the dramatist, and have never been known to ask for their parts to be written up. They are admirably docile, and have no personalities at all.[70]

Wilde's wry endorsement of the impersonal puppet accords with the opinions of other writers interested in marionette choreography, from Kleist to the Bauhaus director Oskar Schlemmer, who speculated about the advantages of using automatons in his *Triadisches Ballet* (1922): "Why should not the dancers actually be marionettes, controlled by wires, or better still, by a device of perfect mechanical precision which would work automatically?"[71] This type of commentary on the prospect of a depersonalised performer can be traced back to Wilde's approval of the dramatist's "presiding intellect," which prioritises the dominant vision of the author in a way that Yeats and Beckett would later promote in their own complex encounters with dancers. Yet Wilde's enthusiasm for supplanting the human performer with the marionette was tempered by a contrary anxiety, felt by many at the time, regarding the possible rebellion of such machines and their subversive potential for self-realisation.

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[70] Wilde to the Editor of the *Daily Telegraph*, 19 February [1892], *Letters*, 311.
[71] Oskar Schlemmer, quoted in Julian Olf, "The Man/ Marionette Debate in Modern Theatre," *Educational Theatre Journal* 26 (1974): 491.

These conflicting impressions regarding mechanised and depersonalised performing bodies found expression elsewhere in Wilde's writing. Imprisoned in Reading Gaol in 1897, Wilde considers this alternative side to the puppet in *De Profundis*, his long letter to Lord Alfred Douglas:

> It makes me feel sometimes as if you yourself had been merely a puppet worked by some secret and unseen hand to bring terrible events to a terrible issue. But puppets themselves have passions. They will bring a new plot into what they are presenting, and twist the ordered issue of vicissitude to suit some whim or appetite of their own. To be entirely free, and at the same time entirely dominated by law, is the eternal paradox of human life that we realise at every moment.
>
> <div align="right">(CW, 997)</div>

Ruminating on the ultimate restrictions imposed on free will, Wilde summons the artificial body of the puppet to illustrate the challenge these figures might pose to external modes of authority. In this passage, the puppet conforms to the rule of a presiding power – be it the playwright or the law – but at the same time unsettles this power through its own assertions of creative will. Images of marionettes and mechanical bodies flourished in literature and art of the late nineteenth century, and their representations were governed by this kind of double function, which accounts for both the impersonality and the uncanny agency of the automaton. Crucially, the relationship between the dancer and the director or choreographer – central to Salome's diverse afterlives – played out this tension through the practice of dance.

Wilde's reflections on the nature of the performer's agency, with its attending constraints, place him in dialogue with a range of nineteenth- and twentieth-century theories of corporeal movement and subjectivity as they related to the actor, repeatedly illustrated using the example of the dancing marionette. As Kerry Powell has persuasively shown, Wilde's early self-fashioning as a dandy developed into more sophisticated political considerations of the place of performance in a world that, to him, appeared increasingly shaped by an overarching "script" or system of power.[72] Such notions of the body are central to Wilde's *Salomé*, which has alternately been read as a work populated by "puppets moved by forces outside themselves," and,

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[72] Kerry Powell, *Acting Wilde: Victorian Sexuality, Theatre, and Oscar Wilde* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 3-4. Eltis has pointed out that dandyism is by no means apolitical, even if it signals itself to be detached from political life; see *Revising Wilde*, 6-7.

conversely, as a play demonstrating "a rebellious commitment to human agency."[73] As I have shown in the preceding commentary, a combination of these seemingly oppositional readings might open up new avenues for reading Wilde's complex approach to Salome's dancing body.

"Serpent of Old Nile": Bodies, Bernhardt, and Symbolist Language

During one of their many meetings in Paris, Wilde reportedly told the Guatemalan critic Gomez Carillo, later the biographer of the dancer Mata Hari, that he "[could not] conceive of a Salome who is unconscious of what she does, a Salome who is but a silent and passive instrument."[74] The feminist overtones of this statement are undermined by Wilde's insistence that his Salome must dance "utterly naked," save for jewels that render "the utter shamelessness of that warm flesh even more shocking." Emphasising his dancer's "limitless cruelty," Wilde slips back into the coarse judgements of sexual transgression and monstrous womanhood previously espoused by Huysmans.[75] Yet Carillo goes on to note the inconsistency of Wilde's position: "on other occasions his Salomé was almost chaste. […] there were ten, no, a hundred Salomés that he imagined."[76] Emerging from this account is a sense of Salome's endless multiplicity; her composite nature, taken from a wide range of sources, and her openness to interpretation.

Wilde's treatment of gender and sexuality in *Salomé* has preoccupied numerous critics, and it is not my intention to repeat all of their arguments at this point. Specifically, I am concerned with how the play's lyrical dramatic register unsettles straightforward readings of Salome's dance as an erotic act controlled by a possessive, patriarchal gaze.[77] One of the play's most striking features is its ornate Symbolist language, which critics such as Regenia Gagnier have read alongside Beardsley's illustrations as a coded expression of homosexuality, attempting to "seduce a broader audience into an awareness of its suppressed longings."[78] Energised

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[73] Worth, *Irish Drama*, 101; Dierkes-Thrun, *Salome's Modernity*, 2.
[74] Gomez Carillo, "How Oscar Wilde dreamed of Salomé," in *Interviews*, 193.
[75] Carillo, "Salomé," 193.
[76] Ibid., 194.
[77] Critical efforts to address Wilde's gender and sexual politics in *Salomé* include: Garber, *Vested Interests*, 338-346; Rhonda K. Garelick, *Rising Star: Dandyism, Gender and Performance in the Fin de Siècle* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 128-153; Helen Davies, "The Trouble with Gender in *Salomé*," in *Refiguring Oscar Wilde's Salome,* 55-69; Lois Cucullu, "Wilde and Wilder Salomés: Modernising Wilde's Nubile Princess from Sarah Bernhardt to Norma Desmond," *Modernism/modernity* 18 (2011): 495-524.
[78] Gagnier, *Idylls of the Marketplace,* 140.

by Wilde's biography, many scholars have subsequently pursued this notion of suppressed and subtextual desire in relation to *Salomé*.[79] Like Garber, Elaine Showalter uses the famous photograph of "Wilde in costume as Salome" (initially reproduced in Ellmann's biography) to unveil the play's "buried and coded messages," conflating "female corrosive desire and male homosexual love."[80] The Salome in this photograph was later identified as the Hungarian opera singer Alice Guszalewicz, showing how a critical eagerness to discern a homosexual male figure among Salome's veils risks entirely erasing the presence of the real female body. Despite producing fruitful and thoughtful readings, such approaches to *Salomé* tend to privilege the position of the queer man at the expense of the woman performing the dance, as suggested by Showalter's approval of Lindsay Kemp's all-male *Salomé*, and her contrary disappointment that "women's performances of Salome have seemed so unsatisfying."[81] Although the body of Salome is veiled by Wilde's language as well as by her costume, I trace the emergence of a subtle form of female authority in this space of uncertainty.

In Wilde's play, solid accounts of embodiment are evaded by streams of mutating similes, tropes of mirroring and spectrality, and elliptical Symbolist descriptions. Salome in particular is consistently rendered in comparative terms. The young Syrian Captain expresses his desire for her in language that appears to lose its object at the moment it seeks to represent her: "Never have I seen her so pale. She is like the shadow of a white rose in a mirror of silver" (*PI*, 707). Wilde's dialogue is rife with allusions to "pale[ness]," "shadow[s]," and other indicators of insubstantiality, and here the simile reduces Salome to a reflection, calling upon the image of the mirror that enjoyed such popularity among French symbolists. In Mallarmé's *Hérodiade*, for instance, Hérodiade addresses her mirror in very similar terms: "I have appeared in you like a distant shadow, / But horror! Evenings, in your severe fountain, / I have known the nudity of my sparse dream."[82] Subtly interweaving tropes of awe and horror, Mallarmé aligns his Salome with the concept of the sublime and evokes the transfixed states that often arise in response to sublime objects: "my solitary body

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[79] For example, Gail Finney argues: "Wilde's *Salomé* emerges less as a misogynistic denunciation of the femme fatale than as a masked depiction of one man's longing for another." See *Women in Modern Drama: Freud, Feminism, and European Theater at the Turn of the Century* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), 65.
[80] Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy*, 156. See Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde,* 402-403.
[81] Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy*, 167; 164.
[82] Stéphane Mallarmé, "Herodiade," trans. David Lenson, *The Massachusetts Review* 30, no. 4 (Winter 1989): 583.

freezes it / With horror, and my hair that the light entwines / Is immortal. Woman, a kiss would kill me / If beauty weren't death . . ."[83] Sublimely remote, frigid, and impersonal, Salome possesses an unreal and emphatically unwomanly body, defined by the kind of corrupt and unyielding virginity writers of the period often associated with this particular figure. Moreover, in both Mallarmé's and Wilde's writing, mirrors act as repositories for fragmented forms of self-knowledge, but ultimately return, in Margaret Stoljar's reading, "a shadow, a question, perhaps a delusion," in line with a Symbolist figuration of the self as an artificial construct.[84]

Such an anxiously postulated female body tests the limits of spectatorship and gives rise to concerns about the effects of watching Salome perform. The Page of Herodias frets that the Syrian Captain is "always looking at [Salome]. You look at her too much. It is dangerous to look at people in such a fashion" (*PI*, 707). The pair then note the Tetrarch's "sombre look," and wonder "at whom is he looking?" (*PI*, 707). Salome finds it "strange that the husband of [her] mother looks at [her] like that" (*PI*, 710), while Herod admits that he has "looked at [her] overmuch" (*PI*, 726). Above all the players, the moon, with which Salome is continuously aligned, appears "like a dead woman. One might fancy she was looking for dead things" (*PI*, 707). Building a network of suspect gazes, Wilde subtly refutes previous configurations of Salome as a passive muse, whose dangerous lust is reinterpreted as a projection of the male spectator's fantasies. If, as Dierkes-Thrun suggests, Wilde's Herod is modelled on Huysmans's male aesthete, he is an aesthete whose attempts to turn the body of the woman into an artwork consistently fail.[85] Wilde's Salome is envoiced: she challenges the "strange" gaze of Herod, and, as Armstrong perceptively notes, she rejects his offers of jewels, peacocks, and gifts, eschewing the lure of Decadent aesthetics and asserting her own desire in its place; a desire predicated on the destruction of the male body.[86]

In this way, a more complex picture of Salome's authority in the play emerges. Wilde's Salome resolutely looks back. Her language is explicit, full-bodied and sensuous, and, like the rest of the play's dialogue, it also measures its objects in Symbolist terms. "What is Symbolism if not an establishing of the links which hold

[83] Mallarmé, "Herodiade," 582.
[84] Margaret Stoljar, "Mirror and Self in Symbolist and Post-Symbolist Poetry," *The Modern Language Review* 85 (1990): 364.
[85] Dierkes-Thrun, *Salome's Modernity*, 39.
[86] Armstrong, *Modernism, Technology and the Body*, 160-161.

the world together, the affirmation of an eternal, minute, intricate, almost invisible life [?]" asks Symons in his commentary on Huysmans. In *Against Nature* and Huysmans's other novels, Symons finds this vital thread in an excess of "description, that heaping up of detail, that passionately patient elaboration."[87] This description of Symbolist method certainly applies to Salome's address to Iokanaan, which parodies the Song of Solomon in its fervent effusions:

> It is thy mouth that I desire, Iokanaan. Thy mouth is like a band of scarlet on a tower of ivory. It is like a pomegranate cut in twain with a knife of ivory. The pomegranate flowers that blossom in the gardens of Tyre, and are redder than roses, are not so red. The red blasts of trumpets that herald the approach of kings, and make afraid the enemy, are not so red. (*PI*, 714)

These lines are rich in extravagant allusion, but upon closer inspection, Iokanaan's body slips further from its analogic counterparts as Salome's description intensifies.[88] His mouth, initially grounded in the obstinate materiality of an ivory tower, softens into the flesh of a fruit, before thinning into a flower's petals, and finally evaporating into the airy nothing of sound. Symbolist utterances will not grant Salome the body she seeks to possess, but her colonising of the aesthete's idiom powerfully unsettles the gender dynamics of Wilde's play.

Importantly for this analysis of Salome's dancing body, a number of critics have interpreted Wilde's allusive and metaphor-laden style as a means of disavowing bodily presence. Comparing the dramatic speech of *Salomé* to a sixteenth-century "blazon," Chad Bennett argues that the lyrical ornamentation of the play removes the possibility of stable meanings and physical presences, "transforming what it forms, effacing what it faces, and disfiguring what it figures."[89] Moreover, for Bennett, Salome herself is a point of crisis for this poetics of disavowal: "there is a gap in Wilde's play: the body of Salome is missing."[90] Describing Salome as "the speaking icon of the male gaze," Brad Bucknell concurs that to "'see' Salome is too see the eye of the male beholder looking back at itself – to see the blank space of the nameless daughter[.]"[91] While these readings identify the veiled nature of Salome's body at the

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[87] Symons, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, 76.
[88] See Solomon 1:1-12 and 7:1-10 in particular. Powell notes the similarity between the Song of Solomon and Salome's speech to Iokanaan in *Acting Wilde*, 60-61.
[89] Chad Bennett, "Oscar Wilde's *Salome*: Décor, Des Corps, Desire," *ELH* 77 (2010): 309.
[90] Ibid., 317.
[91] Brad Bucknell, "On 'Seeing' Salome," *ELH* 60, no. 2 (Summer 1993): 523.

level of language, they miss the clear promise of Wilde's rhetorical strategies: if Salome's body is construed as a "gap" that cannot be readily apprehended by the male players, a space is created for the female dancer to author her own performance. The failure of Symbolist language to conjure Salome's body powerfully leaves open the possibility that Salome might write her own body into the play through the mute language of dance.

In this way, new possibilities for the performer emerge through the comparative brevity of Wilde's stage direction: "Salome dances the dance of the seven veils" (*PI*, 725). Unlike the surrounding dialogue, it summons a body, rather than overwriting its presence through extended metaphors. Although Wilde's lack of specificity surrounding the choreography for the dance has frustrated scholars, his determination that Sarah Bernhardt should play Salome offers an insight into the kind of female performance he envisaged, read in the context of his own attitudes towards gender. Although Powell, among others, reads the decapitated figure of Iokanaan as a castrated body, signalling Wilde's "homosexual horror at the prospect of the 'new woman'," this interpretation does not convincingly align with Wilde's demonstrated attitudes towards women. Sos Eltis has done much to revise critical understandings of Wilde's engagement with early feminist politics, showing how he was in fact deeply immersed in the conversations surrounding women's rights and gender identity in the late nineteenth century, beyond the more familiar subjects of male homosexuality and dandyism. Wilde was notably involved in the production of early feminist publications, such as *Women's World*, which he edited for a short period of time.[92] Under his editorship, the magazine solicited contributions from suffragists such as Millicent Fawcett, shifting the emphasis of the publication from the realm of domestic interests into the political sphere.[93] Furthermore, Wilde's preference for Bernhardt implies that his Salome would not be embodied by a semi-naked ingénue but instead by a singularly powerful actor, whose performances had transformed nineteenth-century theatre.

As a Salome that never was, Bernhardt nonetheless offered a vital precedent: her stage presence lent Salome authority, grounding the role in gender fluidity and perhaps foreshadowing the later affiliations between twentieth-century feminists and Salome dancers, which I discuss in Chapter Two. Wilde claimed that "the only person

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[92] Powell, *Acting Wilde*, 64; Armstrong also reads Iokanaan's body as an emblematic of castration anxieties in *Modernism, Technology and the Body*, 161.
[93] Eltis, *Revising Wilde*, 7-13.

in the world who could act Salomé is Sarah Bernhardt, that 'serpent of old Nile,' older than the Pyramids."[94] Alluding to Bernhardt's recent performance in Sardou's *Cléopâtre*, Wilde implicitly places his Salome in the tradition of regally assertive female leads. W. Graham Robertson was to design the production in London featuring Bernhardt, and the costumes from *Cléopâtre* were undergoing modification to be re-used in *Salomé*, promising a visual symmetry between the two plays.[95] Despite Wilde's previous claim that the ideal actor would respect the presiding will of the dramatist, it appears that Bernhardt was able to assert her creative authority early on. She allegedly declared that her hair would be dyed blue for the role, prompting Wilde to object that Herodias should have blue hair. Not to be deterred Bernhardt simply replied, "I *will* have blue hair."[96] Clearly, "the divine Sarah" had the artistic capital to shape the course of the production, suggesting that it was to be a collaborative effort between actor, playwright, and director, rather than a mere vessel for the writer's dramatic text.

Bernhardt's body also denoted a particular range of possibilities for the role of Salome. In a slightly unforgiving reading, Riquelme points out that Bernhardt, who was nearly fifty in 1892, "could have been no sylph," rendering it unlikely that Salome's dance would be staged as a "provocative spectacle."[97] His use of the term "sylph" is significant, since it proposes a stylistic correlation between the Salome dancer and the "sylphs" of romantic ballet. As I have previously suggested, Wilde's interest in marionette choreographies distances his Salome from the sylph-like ballerina, praised by Mallarmé, instead aligning his dancer with discourses surrounding mechanical and automated movement, indicating a different set of physical qualities and forms of spectatorship. While the marionette-dancer might be more easily swayed by the control of the dramatist, it might also, as Kleist reminds us, creatively subvert and surpass human capabilities. Women's bodies were repeatedly connected with images of automatons in literature of this period and Salome's dance, as a performance ordered by a male Tetrarch, opens up related questions regarding female submission, creativity, and control. Appropriately,

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[94] Wilde to Leonard Smithers, 2 September [1900], *Letters*, 834. Wilde also uses this line from *Antony and Cleopatra* in his poem for the actor Ellen Terry, "Camma": "And yet – methinks I'd rather see thee play/ That serpent of old Nile, whose witchery/ Made Emperors drunk, – come great Egypt […]"; see *CW,* 861.
[95] Tydeman and Price, *Wilde: Salome*, 20-23.
[96] Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde*, 351.
[97] Riquelme, "Shalom/Solomon/*Salomé*," 583.

Bernhardt's performance techniques emphasised her physical power and flexibility, suggesting that her body was her instrument and the site of her creative intent: "onstage, [her] body conveyed a contained mobility, a coiled vitality even when at rest." Moreover, her "scandalous" rejection of a corset allowed her to "twist and spiral" her body across the stage, somewhat like a machine at work.[98] Aligning Bernhardt's freely moving body with a disavowal of the tight, restrictive clothing that defined the costume of the ballerina, and the corseted body of the nineteenth-century society lady, these critical descriptions emphasise the plasticity and feminist authority of her performance.

Reports and reviews during the period reflected this assessment of Bernhardt's transformative qualities. Commenting on a production of de Musset's *Lorenzaccio* at the Adelphi Theatre in 1897, the *Manchester Guardian* reviewer admitted that "though a woman in a man's part is seldom altogether pleasing, it must be owned that Madame Bernhardt makes an effective figure in her black Hamlet-like costume."[99] Such acknowledgements of Bernhardt's ambiguous gender presentation anticipated her most famous role as the lead in *Hamlet*, which played in Paris and London in 1899. The *New York Tribune* expressed incredulity at Bernhardt's ready embodiment of the male figure, praising her "graceful, boyish" appearance, and concluding that "every move and gesture is that of a man."[100] Bernhardt's vocabulary of physical motions, rather than the sonorous tones of her famous voice, equipped her to adopt the guise of a man. Her preparations for *Salomé* can therefore be read as imbuing the part with a certain playfulness in terms of gender presentation. Bernhardt likely grasped the "camp appeal of a middle-aged woman portraying (or trying to 'pass' as) a nubile princess," according to Rhonda Garelick, who argues that Bernhardt's mature body would have displaced the erotic focus of the work.[101] Such a revision of the Salome narrative importantly deviates from the conventional treatment of Salome's body as a site of passive sexual spectacle, allowing an authoritative, powerful Salome to resist the petrifying gaze of the male aesthete and assert control over the drama's gender dynamics, along with its Symbolist register.

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[98] Sharon Marcus, "Salomé!! Sarah Bernhardt, Oscar Wilde, and the Drama of Celebrity," *PMLA* 126 (2011): 1004; 1005.
[99] "Madame Sarah Bernhardt in London," *Manchester Guardian*, June 18, 1897, ProQuest.
[100] "Bernhardt's Hamlet," *New York Tribune*, June 11, 1899, ProQuest.
[101] Garelick, *Rising Star*, 149.

"Not a girl dancing": Reading Salome's Veils

Since Bernhardt's production of *Salomé* was cancelled before it could be staged, her plans for the dance of the seven veils remain in the realm of speculation. Certainly, she was determined to perform the dance herself. When the designer W. Graham Robertson asked her if she would have a trained dancer step in at the necessary moment, as often happened in subsequent productions of Strauss's *Salome* opera,[102] Bernhardt replied firmly that she would be undertaking the dance on her own. Asking for details of the choreography, Robertson was told: "Never you mind."[103] Echoing Wilde's sly avoidance of visual clarity – his allusions to an "invisible" and "veiled" dance – Bernhardt gave little away regarding her intentions, retaining a sense of the dance's mysterious resistance to articulation; its continuous evasion of language. Bernhardt did reveal that she felt that the play was "heraldic, fresco-like," and required "no rapidity of movement but stylised hieratic gestures."[104] Whether or not such slow, precise, and evocative poses would have extended to her dance is uncertain, but they do suggest an alternative way of interpreting Salome's movements, standing at a distance from the belly-dances and stripteases of other versions, and demonstrating Bernhardt's ability to read the bodily rhetoric of the play on her own terms.

Although the "dance of the seven veils" is a frustratingly cryptic stage direction, it nonetheless operates as a focal point for the dramatic action; as Donohue asserts, "Salome as dancer, and Salome's dance, together set the keynote for understanding the play."[105] Other writers who turned to the figure of Salome prior to Wilde, such as Mallarmé, also demonstrated a sustained interest in the relationship between dance and literary practice, although their own Salomes rarely demanded choreographies, remaining within the confines of the poetic text. In his essay on the "Ballets" (1886), Mallarmé held up the dancer as a sublime embodiment of Symbolist expression; a perfect union of form and content. Describing the movements of the dancer Elena Cornalba performing in *Les Deux Pigeons,* Mallarmé developed his influential concept of "corporeal writing":

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[102] In the first performances of Strauss's *Salome* in Dresden and New York, the opera singer Olive Fremstad was replaced with the ballerina Bianca Froehlich. See Tydeman and Price, *Wilde: Salome*, 128.
[103] Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde*, 351.
[104] Tydeman and Price, *Wilde: Salome*, 20.
[105] Joseph Donohue, "Distance, Death and Desire in *Salomé*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Oscar Wilde*, ed. Peter Raby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 121.

> *[T]he dancer is not a woman dancing*, for these juxtaposed reasons: that *she is not a woman*, but a metaphor summing up one of the elementary aspects of our form: knife, goblet, flower, etc., and that *she is not dancing*, but suggesting, through the miracle of bends and leaps, a kind of corporeal writing, what it would take pages of prose, dialogue, and description to express, if it were transcribed: a poem independent of any scribal apparatus.[106]

For Mallarmé, the dancer's punctuated movements work like an inscription, tracing the course of the body through space in a manner analogous to language. Quoting from this passage, Jones has argued that Mallarmé "shifts the aesthetics of dance away from a tradition of literal representation, instead emphasising the creative input of the dancer who 'suggests' form as she moves."[107] It is difficult to reconcile this reading entirely with Mallarmé's subtle eclipsing of the dancer's creative authorship within her chosen discipline: he describes the dancing figure as an "unlettered ballerina," and later asserts, using Salomean imagery, that "she hastily delivers up, through the ultimate veil that always remains, the nudity of your concepts, and writes your vision silently like a sign, which she is."[108] The dancer, then, works as an "unconscious" mirror for the creative vision of the poet-spectator, returning his "concepts" through her symbolic performance, which, recalling Bergson's terms, offers a vision of grace predicated on the imagination of the viewer.

Although Mallarmé places the poet in a position of "submissive" worship before the dancer, he insists upon the poet's ability to read the dance through "the Flower *of [his] poetic instinct*," whereas the dancer remains "unlettered" and therefore diminished by a body-intellect paradigm that restricts women to sensual and physical concerns.[109] Mallarmé's theory of dance, whilst formative for later uses of dance in literature and drama, therefore comes into conflict with the performance philosophy of an actor like Bernhardt, who disengages from the "sylph-like" imagery of the ballerina and proves resistant to the aestheticising vision of the male spectator. Of course, Bernhardt was merely one imagined Salome, and Wilde refuted claims that he had written the play specifically with her in mind. In a letter of March 1893 to the editor of *The Times*, Wilde explained that whilst it was "a source of pride and pleasure to [him]" that "the greatest tragic actress of any stage now living" should accept the

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[106] Stéphane Mallarmé, "Ballets," in *Divagations*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 130.
[107] Jones, *Literature, Modernism and Dance*, 15.
[108] Mallarmé, "Ballets," 134.
[109] Ibid.

part of Salome, he had "in no sense of the words written [it] for this great actress."[110] Furthermore, he confided to Adolphe Retté, who read and corrected an early version of the play in French, that he "would like to see the role of Salome played by an actress who was also a first-class dancer." Retté recalls that Wilde then "imagined all the possibilities of this idea and held [him] spell-bound."[111] There were also rumours that Wilde meant the part of Salome for Eugenie Petrescue, a Romanian acrobat whom he saw at the Moulin Rouge dancing on her hands, as in Flaubert's "Hérodias."[112] The choreography of the dance was clearly a source of multiple creative possibilities as far as Wilde was concerned, and it is important to note that he emphasised the abilities of the dancer to Retté, signalling the centrality of the dance to the form and dramatic efficacy of the play, despite Ross's scepticism about this particular element.

However, given the prohibition of the English stage version of *Salomé*, the first visual account of this dance was provided through Aubrey Beardsley's illustrations, which originally accompanied the 1894 English translation and were reprinted in uncensored form in the 1907 reissue of *Salomé*. Wilde apparently had a vexed relationship with these drawings: he called them "cruel and evil [...] like naughty scribbles a precocious schoolboy makes in the margins of his copybook."[113] Perhaps he was offended by Beardsley's wry insertion of him into one of the images: in "The Woman in the Moon," Wilde's recognisable features are etched onto the moon, looking longingly at the naked form of a feminised man. This may have come a little close to the bone after the success of *The Poet and the Puppets*, a play by Charles Brookfield and J. M. Glover that premiered in 1892 and was, in Wilde's words, "a burlesque of Lady Windermere's Fan in which an actor dressed up as me and imitated my voice and manner!!!"[114] That the Censor should license such a work in London and refuse *Salomé* a stage was of particular outrage to Wilde, and in the wake of such a humiliation, Beardsley's wry caricatures seemed to demote him from presiding artist to mere prop, alluding uncomfortably to his sexual proclivities.

Yet Beardsley's illustrations have become inseparable from Salome's cultural

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[110] Wilde to the Editor of *The Times*, 1 March [1893], *Letters*, 335-336.
[111] Retté, "Salomé," 191.
[112] Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde*, 324. John Stokes identified Petrescue as the acrobat; see *In the Nineties* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 191.
[113] Oscar Wilde, quoted in Robert Tanitch, *Oscar Wilde on Stage and Screen* (London: Methuen, 1999), 138-139.
[114] Wilde to William Rothenstein, July [1892], *Letters*, 316.

legacy, and Wilde did acknowledge that the artist was the only other individual who could see Salome's "invisible dance." The dance itself is portrayed in an image titled "The Stomach Dance," which, far from "invisible," explicitly emphasises the erotic charge of the performance (Fig. 3). Salome is shown dancing on a dark floor, which reflects Ricketts's original plans to stage the play on a black surface in contrast to Salome's luminous feet, described by the Syrian Captain as "little white doves."[115] In "The Stomach Dance," one of these delicate white feet is scaled and clawed, revealing the animalistic potential of Salome's body, which was often connected to Medusan metaphors of petrification and unveiling.[116] Salome is shown with her breasts and stomach fully exposed, rendering the dance a titillating display for the wretched minstrel lurking in the corner of the frame, nursing a fairly obvious erection that was surprisingly missed by the play's publisher John Lane. Significantly, Beardsley's Salome is staring back at her viewers, her gaze fixed resolutely ahead, confronting any voyeuristic spectator peering at the illustration. Furthermore, the outlandish creature in the corner can be interpreted as a satirical take on the aesthetes who lingered over Salome's image for their own enjoyment, writ large on his contorted face and leering expression. Although Beardsley's image proved influential to the course of the Salome dance in popular culture after the fin-de-siècle, encouraging its performance as a striptease, it also critiques the function of the dance as erotic spectacle, foregrounding the imposing authority of the female performer and reducing the role of the voyeur to that of masturbatory grotesque.

Despite its essential place in Wilde's dramatic imagination, Salome's dance retained a sense of impossibility, or, at least, unfathomable multiplicity. Recalling Wilde's long meditations on the nature of Salome's movements and appearance, Carillo described the numerous transformations undergone by Wilde's princess, as the dramatist consulted the many paintings and texts dedicated to her enigmatic dance:

> The curves of her long, pale body, he said to me, are like those of a lily. Her beauty has nothing of this world about it…Thin veils woven by the angels wrap round her slender figure. The golden waves of her hair conceal the delights of her neck. Her eyes shine and sparkle, and are the very stars of hope or faith. […]

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[115] Ricketts, *Recollections,* 53. See also Tydeman and Price, *Wilde: Salome*, 46.
[116] Showalter reads Salome and Medusa as signs of a castration complex using Freud's short essay on "Medusa's Head" (1922). See *Sexual Anarchy*, 145-46.

© The British Library Board. "The Stomach Dance." A Portfolio of Aubrey Beardsley's Drawings illustrating *Salomé* by Oscar Wilde.

> Yet these priestess-like visions quickly gave way to weird sexual fantasies, to cruel incarnations of Beauty the Prophetess, to hallucinatory and mythic portrayals of Woman's omnipotence.[117]

At one moment, Wilde imagined his dancer as a vision of unearthly grace, enveloped and protected by her sacred veils, yet soon after, these same veils were deployed to accentuate her barely-concealed nakedness, emphasising the eroticism and spectacular excess of her performance. According to Carillo, whose voluptuous account must be treated with a degree of caution, Wilde's speculative conversations about the choreography were framed by such a wide variety of sources – from Titian, Stanzioni, and Veronese, to Bernardo-Luigi, Dürer, Regnault, and Huysmans – that his own scope for invention was paradoxically tightened: "The great English poet was always looking for, but never finding, the real Salomé who remains lost in the mist of ages."[118] Carillo's phrasing, however, suggests that he may have misconstrued Wilde's intentions. It is unlikely that the author who wrote that great celebration of artifice, "The Decay of Lying" (1891) would be overly preoccupied with discovering the "real" Salome; rather, as that essay suggests, the best art, in Salomean fashion, must "kiss [the] false, beautiful lips" of invention in the knowledge that "Truth is entirely and absolutely a matter of style" (*CW,* 1081). The "dizzying chain of collapsing paradoxes" Hugh Haughton identifies in this work testifies to Wilde's complex and ambivalent engagements with the notions of truth, reality, and authenticity, which were so often circumscribed by his dedication to style and performance.[119] In this context, Wilde's dance of the seven veils can be read as a site of stylistic innovation and individual authorship, controlled by each adapter and performer of the myth as they dance in the wake of a long line of Salomes, each as true and beautifully false as the last.

For many critics and interpreters of the performance, Salome remains a consummate undresser, whose dance is primarily a means of seduction. Although Wilde's elliptical directions do not specify that Salome's veils should be discarded at any point, the veil itself has been read as a marker of erotic revelation, loosely concealing a body that dances continuously on the brink of exposure. This is not, however, the veil's only or ultimate purpose. When pioneers of modern dance such

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[117] Carillo, "Salomé," 193.
[118] Ibid., 195.
[119] Hugh Haughton, "Oscar Wilde: Thinking Style," in *Thinking Through Style*, ed. Michael D. Hurley and Marcus Waithe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 267.

as Loïe Fuller and Isadora Duncan began to experiment with costume and technology in dance practice, they divested the veil of its specific sexual meaning, alternately exploring its Hellenic roots and cinematic potential, and proposing new methods of construing the relationship between the veil and the female body. As Richard Allan Cave has observed, the lack of evidence relating to the performance of Salome's dance in other early productions, such as the 1906 *Salomé* featuring Florence Darragh, has made it difficult to write with certainty about the nature of the choreography.[120] It is clear, however, that the historical entanglements of Wilde, Bernhardt, and Beardsley qualify the traditional narrative of Salome's dance as a "seductive striptease," emphasising instead the power of the female dancer to write her body into the performance, displacing the male spectator from the play's dramatic centre.

A Modernist Muse: Wildean Afterlives

Through her Wildean heritage and associations with Bernhardt, Beardsley, and French Symbolism, Salome's dancing body came to operate as a cultural shorthand for a range of (sometimes opposing) erotic interests and experiments in form and dramatic language. For Wilde, Salome's body was a synecdoche for the play itself, and he even personified the published text when he sent copies out to his friends. He wrote to Edmund Gosse that he hoped "Salome will find her way to that delightful library you have let us know of, and if she be not too Tyrian in her raiment be suffered to abide there for a season," wryly continuing: "should she try to dance, a stern look from a single tome by an eighteenth century writer will quell her, for common sense she has none."[121] This rhetorical manoeuvre was echoed by Wilde's correspondents, who similarly described the book as if it were the body of a woman. When his copy of the play failed to materialise, George Bernard Shaw retorted that "Salome is still wandering in her purple raiment in search of me, and I expect her to arrive a perfect outcast, branded with inky stamps, bruised by flinging from hard hands into red prison vans, stuffed and contaminated."[122] Passed between these men, Salome's body is treated as chattel, roughly manhandled (in Shaw's case) as her text travels from place to place. Although these communications reveal the same conquering impulses

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[120] Richard Allen Cave, "Staging Salome's Dance in Wilde's Play and Strauss's Opera," in *Refiguring Oscar Wilde's Salome*, 149.
[121] Wilde to Edmund Gosse, 23 February [1893], *Letters*, 331.
[122] George Bernard Shaw to Wilde, 28 February [1893], *Letters*, 332.

that emerge from earlier encounters between male writers and Salome, they also show that her body was figuratively construed as a living, embodied means of stimulating artistic discourse in this creative community. Moreover, as Shaw's letter suggests, she remains un-mastered: a body that has been promised but not, in the event, delivered.

Salome's enduring power as a source of collaborative possibility between writers and dancers, which persisted across the twentieth century, can perhaps be traced back to a meeting between Wilde and the young Sergei Diaghilev at the close of the fin-de-siècle. In the summer of 1897, Diaghilev travelled to Dieppe and met Aubrey Beardsley, although the apparent purpose of his journey was to secure an introduction to Wilde, who had recently been released from prison.[123] Missing the author on this occasion, Diaghilev then went to Paris in February 1898, where he met with Wilde, who described the Russian ingénue as "a great amateur of Aubrey's art."[124] According to Diaghilev, the two men strolled arm in arm down the Grands Boulevards, while prostitutes "shouted abuse" at them from the doors of cafés, in scenes redolent of "The Harlot's House."[125] Although it is not clear what subjects they discussed, Wilde's mention of Beardsley in conjunction with Diaghilev's artistic interests suggests the illustrations for *Salomé* as a point of contact between the three men. Certainly, Salome was the Wildean figure that apparently lingered longest in Diaghilev's mind. In 1913, after the controversy surrounding Nijinsky's choreography for *Le Sacre du Printemps*, the Ballets Russes performed *La Tragédie de Salomé*, featuring Tamara Karsavina in the lead role, which, as Tydeman and Price point out, restored the ballerina to centre stage following the dramatic exploits of Nijinsky.[126] This ballet was one of many instances of dancers and choreographers reinventing the figure of Salome after Wilde, underlining the growing imaginative proximity between literary and choreographic practitioners, which was fuelled by modernist engagements with dance, performance, and theories of movement.

Although it was banned on the English stage, Wilde's *Salomé* quickly achieved a powerful status in the public imagination internationally, dislodging this particular dancer from the elevated idiom of Symbolist writing to a cultural phenomenon open

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[123] This meeting is described by Diaghilev's friend Alexandre Benois in his *Memoirs*, trans Moura Budberg (London: Chatto & Windus, 1964), 103. For a full account, see Annabel Rutherford, "The Triumph of the Veiled Dance: The Influence of Oscar Wilde and Aubrey Beardsley on Serge Diaghilev's Creation of the Ballets Russes," *Dance Research* 27 (2009): 93-107.
[124] Wilde to Leonard Smithers, c. 4 May [1898], *Letters*, 734.
[125] Richard Buckle, *Diaghilev* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1979), 38. See Rutherford, "The Triumph of the Veiled Dance," 94.
[126] Tydeman and Price, *Wilde: Salome*, 149.

to popular interpretation. As well as receiving a balletic adaptation by the Ballets Russes, Salome's performance was co-opted by dancers including Fuller, Maud Allan, and Ida Rubinstein. Popular songs often featured the story of Salome, and she was a staple of circus acts and illusions: the programme for Jack Straw's Castle of Mystery at Rosherville Gardens in 1900 lists "Salome—in costume" amongst the Chinese puzzles and chambers of horror.[127] Salome also became a fond subject of silent film practitioners in the first decades of the twentieth century, including Alla Nazimova and Tod Browning, who played with the tropes of Salome carnival acts in his film *The Show* (1927). As this varied history illustrates, Salome, one of the period's obsessive myths, was a figure invested with spectacular appeal, whose dance created new conditions for female authorship. Although the dancer's creative role was often set against the aestheticising vision of the writer, the nature of the dance also engendered collaborations between performers and dramatists and offered a timely reflection on the burgeoning connections between literature, choreography, and the visual arts. After Wilde's seminal play, the phenomenon anxiously identified as Salomania transformed the biblical dancer into a modernist muse, whose image became resolutely entangled with the experimental performances of dance pioneers.

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[127] "Jack Straw's Castle of Mystery," 1900 [Handbill], Victorian Popular Culture, accessed March 13, 2017, http://www.victorianpopularculture.amdigital.co.uk/Documents/Details/NFA_178T1.289.

CHAPTER TWO
"Unlocatable Bodies": Incarnations of Salome from Loïe Fuller to Maud Allan

When the actor Gwendolen Bishop wrote to enquire about performance rights for the first London production of *Salomé* in May 1905, Robert Ross expressed some concerns about the realisation of Wilde's dramatic vision. He asked that the group organising the production, the New Stage Club, ensure that "none of the male parts [...] be taken by a lady," and further requested that the actor playing the role of Salome "abstain from introducing in the dancing scene anything of the nature of Loïe Fuller's performances."[1] This is a surprising show of scepticism from Ross, in light of the phenomenal success that the dancer in question achieved in the 1890s, not least as a modern interpreter of the Salome myth.[2] Between Loïe Fuller's arrival in Paris in 1892 and the dancer Maud Allan's infamous libel suit in 1918, Salome was the subject of a wealth of reinventions, encouraged by the permeability of the literary and choreographic cultures so thoroughly marked by her Decadent image. This chapter traces the histories of these Salome dancers in the fin-de-siècle and the early decades of the twentieth century, exploring how their performances reimagined Salome's body as an instrument for female self-fashioning in contrast to a Symbolist tradition largely dominated by representations of monstrous womanhood. Through their dances, and their commentaries on their choreographic practice, these women engaged with and destabilised contemporaneous literary treatments of this biblical figure.

Loïe Fuller's serpentine dance, as Rancière observes in *Aisthesis*, invested the human body with powers of artifice that replicated and surpassed those of Symbolist poetics, mobilising aesthetic forms that had previously been rendered in the static moulds of paint and clay. As part of the same critique, however, Rancière also describes Fuller's body as a problematic element in the choreography, writing of her dance technique:

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[1] Robert Ross, quoted in Tydeman and Price, *Wilde: Salome*, 29-30.

[2] Fuller's career has been the subject of a number of studies, including Rhonda K. Garelick, *Electric Salome: Loïe Fuller's Performance of Modernism* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007); Ann Cooper Albright, *Traces of Light: Absence and Presence in the Work of Loïe Fuller* (Middletown, CN: Wesleyan University Press, 2007); Giovanni Lista, *Loïe Fuller: Danseuse de la Belle Époque* (Paris: Somogy-Stock/ La Librairie de la Danse et le Centre de national du livre, 1995); Richard Current and Marcia Ewing Current, *Loïe Fuller: Goddess of Light* (Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 1997).

It does not reveal the body; it renders it "unlocatable". It does not express inner energy; it makes it an instrument fit to draw forms in space through movement, forms that the painter's brush left on the canvas in two dimensions and the sculptor's knife fixed in immobile forms.[3]

Here, Rancière deploys a critical register that accords with historical reviews of Fuller's choreographies, often described by journalists as elusive and spectral. Yet in his choice of the word "unlocatable" ["*introuvable*"], Rancière displaces the body of the dancing woman in order to convey the apparent ephemerality of her performance, and her body's unstable location within it.[4] Such terminology reflects the subtle rejections of the dancer's gendered form expressed in the writings of Mallarmé and others, who prefer to emphasise the ungraspable nature of the dance, denying, on some level, the dancer's individual control and bodily power.[5] Taking the vexed formula of the "unlocatable body" as a point of departure, this chapter explores Fuller's ability to engineer her own physical displacement, rendering her body a site of imagistic, sexual, and material variability. A revolutionary in the world of dance, Fuller's ideas crystallised around the figure of Salome, whose veils she alluded to in her serpentine dance even before she created two specific Salome choreographies in 1895 and 1907. Maud Allan, influenced by Fuller, used Salome's dance in a very different way to challenge previous incarnations of this figure, and to create a space for the female spectator in her audience. Considering Fuller and Allan's positions within the wider history of modern dance, I suggest that these "modern Salomes" created veiled dances that privileged the body as a site of authorship, reclaiming the figure of Salome as an artist whose expressive power rested in her movement.[6]

While the so-called canon of modernist writing has been historically dominated by the writers Wyndham Lewis referred to as the "men of 1914," the course of modern dance was effectively directed by women, including Fuller, Isadora

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[3] Rancière, *Aisthesis*, 105.

[4] Rancière uses the word "introuvable" (literally "unfindable") in the original French version of *Aisthesis*. The verb "trouver," commonly translated as "to find," also connotes forms of intellectual apprehension and feeling, suggesting that Fuller's body cannot be literally found, but also that it evades stable thought and categorisation. See Jacques Rancière, *Aisthesis: Scènes du régime esthétique de l'art* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 2011), 123.

[5] As Dana Mills has shown, although Rancière's critique of Fuller threatens to eclipse the body of the woman on stage, his aesthetic theories also institute modes of thinking that allow for a gendered reading of the dancing form. See Dana Mills, "The Dancing Woman is the Woman Who Dances into the Future: Rancière, Dance, Politics," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 49 (2016): 482-499.

[6] The press called Fuller the "modern Salome." See Rhonda K. Garelick, "Electric Salome: Loïe Fuller at the Exposition Universelle of 1900," in *Imperialism and Theater: Essays on World Theater, Drama, and Performance*, ed. J. Ellen Gainor (New York: Routledge, 1995), 86.

Duncan, and, in America, Ruth St. Denis.[7] Referring to their dance practice as "aesthetic" or "interpretive," these women had been schooled in the popular theatre rather than the ballet, but they harboured ambitions to turn their own choreographic creations into "high-art."[8] Manipulating large diaphanous veils using hand-held poles, Fuller had coloured lights projected onto her continuously moving body, creating a luminous morphology rooted in the evolutions of her dancing form. As Sally Sommer put it in one of the earliest critiques of Fuller's contribution to dance history, "As light hit the material, it was fractured and diffused by the movement. The effect was one of colour washing, bleeding, running, across a shimmering and iridescent surface."[9] Twisting and spiralling beneath these billowing materials, Fuller's body was largely hidden from her spectators; it existed at the centre of the serpentine dance as a point of vital yet unsettled energy, constantly slipping in and out of view. The ambiguity of Fuller's presence was heightened by the fact that her dances inspired legions of imitators, many of whom masqueraded as Fuller, adopting both her name and her choreographic style. Not only was Fuller's body a site of visual and rhetorical veiling, inspiring associations with Salome, but there was also doubt as to whether it was *her* body at all.

Moreover, the freer, self-directed forms of movement demonstrated by Fuller and the dancers she influenced engaged with early feminist politics, just as they embraced the aesthetic potential of new styles of performance and stage design. The very idea of the modern, as Sally Banes has shown, was often gendered as female in the fin-de-siècle, and ambitious dancers such as Fuller carved a space for women as not merely performers but also choreographers, who could engage with the vibrant "new beauty" of electricity, cinema, and science.[10] For many of the women who performed Salome's dance, Sarah Bernhardt was a key predecessor, and her associations with Wilde and the figure of Salome offered these women a powerful model for female authorship and self-fashioning in the sphere of performance. Yet as I show in this chapter, Salome's body, represented in these dances, continued to operate as a site of sexual inscrutability in the 1890s and afterwards, suggesting that

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[7] Lewis coined this term in his autobiography *Blasting and Bombardiering* (1937). Rachel Blau DuPlessis examines this phrase in her recent essay "'Virile Thought': Modernist Maleness, Poetic Forms and Practices," in *Modernism and Masculinity*, ed. Natalya Lusty and Julian Murphet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 19-37.
[8] Banes, *Dancing Women*, 67.
[9] Sally Sommer, "Loïe Fuller," *The Drama Review* 19 (1975): 54.
[10] Banes, *Dancing Women*, 67-69.

the dancing woman might unsettle patriarchal and heterosexual conceptions of the female body.

Although Fuller was described as modestly chaste in reviews and profiles, her commentators observed a disembodied quality to her performances, which accords with the rhetoric of ghostliness so often ascribed to queer women, as Terry Castle in particular has argued. "The lesbian is never with us," insists Castle, "but always somewhere else: in the shadows, in the margins, hidden from history, out of sight […] a pale denizen of the night."[11] Even when she stands "in plain view," she is characterized as "elusive, vaporous, difficult to spot."[12] This is certainly true of Fuller, who lived with her female partner Gabrielle Bloch (known as Gab Sorère, professionally) for two decades, and yet was commonly portrayed as a kind of cheerful American matron in contemporary profiles, devoid of any allusive erotic life.[13] Some scholars have read Fuller's queerness back into the transformative permutations of her choreography; whilst Allan, known for the undisguised eroticism of her *Vision of Salome*, ended her career defending herself against accusations of lesbianism in a trial that combined erotic intrigue and wartime politics. Reading the radical sexual and choreographic interventions staged by these dancers alongside literary texts in thrall to the image of a veiled Salome, this chapter traces Salome's evolution as a figure invested with the ambivalent qualities of poetic muse and augury of twentieth-century feminist performance.

Mallarmé's Furious Dancer

Loïe Fuller, who is often considered a "pioneer" or a "detonator" in the history of modern dance, was also, as Garelick observes in *Electric Salome*, an "interlocutor": she formed a point of communication between culturally highbrow forms of dance and the more popular styles of the music hall.[14] Fuller was one of the most celebrated performers on the Parisian stage, where she often danced as part of a variety show,

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[11] Terry Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 2.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Comments of this nature include: "She is a hard working, plucky, good little woman whom success has not spoiled," in "Loie Fuller's European Career," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 30, 1893, ProQuest. A later review of a performance by Fuller's dance company opined: "it cannot be charged that erotic incitation characterizes any of the music or the spirit in which the dancers of the present repertoire are interpreted." See "La National: La Loie Fuller and Her Company," *Washington Post*, October 12, 1909, ProQuest.

[14] Garelick, *Electric Salome*, 16.

delivering her serpentine dance and other routines as turns alongside different acts, such as illusionists and magic lantern shows. Fuller's dances were held in unusually high esteem by the French literati as well as the general public: Auguste Rodin and Anatole France considered her a great cultural innovator of the fin-de-siècle, and she also inspired the poet Stéphane Mallarmé to compose a lyrical reflection on her art, entitled "Another Study of Dance: The Fundamentals of Ballet."[15] Mallarmé's essay on Fuller has received significant critical attention since it offers a sustained exploration of the poet's conception of the relationship between choreography and literary aesthetics.[16] It also reveals his preoccupation with the body of the female dancer, who recurs in Mallarmé's work, according to Dee Reynolds, as a "focal point for contradictions and paradoxes in myths of femininity" that persisted across fin-de-siècle French literature and culture.[17]

In 1893, several years after penning his influential statement on Elena Cornalba and the ballet, Mallarmé attended one of Fuller's performances at the Folies Bergère and, entranced by what he witnessed, he recorded his impressions in prose. Although he presented Fuller as the epitome of Symbolist form, Mallarmé did not simply equate the fluid metamorphoses of Fuller's choreography with the lyrical movements of language; rather, he suggested that her performance surpassed the effects of verse:

> To protest that this dazzling illuminate satisfies a pensive delicacy like that attained, for example, by the reading of verse, shows one's ignorance of the subtleties included in the mysteries of Dance. A fully restored aesthetic will surpass the notes scribbled in haste, where, at least, I denounce, taking a closer look, an error common to any staging: aided as I am, unexpectedly, by the sudden solution given by my muse with a tiny shiver of her dress, my almost unconscious, or not voluntarily in question here, inspiration.[18]

Kermode suggests that Fuller's dance, as understood by Mallarmé, "is more perfectly

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[15] This is the English translation of the title that appears in Stéphane Mallarmé, "Scribbles at the Theater," in *Divagations*, 135-137. This essay revises an article that first appeared as "Considérations sur l'art du ballet et la Loïe Fuller," in the *National Observer*, May 13, 1893.

[16] See Frank Kermode, "Poet and Dancer before Diaghilev," *Salmagundi* 33/34 (1976): 23-47; Susan Jones, "'Une écriture corporelle': The Dancer in the Text of Mallarmé and Yeats," in *The Body and the Arts*, ed. Corinne Saunders, Ulrika Maude and Jane Macnaughton (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009): 237-246; Julie Townsend, "Synaesthetics: Symbolism, Dance and the Failure of Metaphor," *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 18 (2005): 126-148.

[17] Dee Reynolds, "The Dancer as Woman: Loïe Fuller and Stéphane Mallarmé," in *Impressions of French Modernity: Art and Literature in France, 1850-1900*, ed. Richard Hobbs (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 155.

[18] Mallarmé, "Another Study of Dance," 136.

devoid of ideas, less hampered by its means, than poetry, […] yet it is not absolutely pure; the dancer is not inhuman."[19] In his response, Kermode invokes the aesthetic judgements conferred upon the female body by Symbolist writers who commonly associated women with nature, sensuous pleasure, and feeling as opposed to masculine reason or logic. Indeed, Mallarmé reaches for literary tropes to anchor Fuller in an aesthetic tradition privileging the inspired vision of the writer, interpreting the female body as an art object. The notion of dance as a "mystery" serves a vital purpose as it shrouds the performer in rhetorical uncertainty, proffering instead a vagueness that obscures the specificity of the dancer's technique and her artistic sovereignty. Although he professes to resist the lure of analogy, the arts of poetry and dance are deeply interconnected in Mallarmé's writing, and he reads Loïe Fuller as his "muse" in relation to his own imaginative impulses.

In this sense, as Felicia McCarren observes, Mallarmé's critique performs a "simultaneous idealization of the dance and dehumanization of the dancer."[20] Mallarmé's descriptions of Fuller show him reaching for appropriate metaphors that are never far away from paradox, and repeatedly illustrate the limits of language when it is placed at the service of dance. At one point, Fuller "appears, like a snowflake," delicate and impermanent, yet quickly transforms into "the furious dancer," enlivened with a seething tangibility.[21] The thought of a snowflake turned to sudden violence is jarring, as are Mallarmé's comments on Fuller's curiously fragile and chilling radiance: "In the terrible cascade of cloth, the figure swoons, radiant, cold."[22] What emerges from this essay is a sense of the difficulty Mallarmé experienced as a spectator (and a poet) in attempting to articulate his thinking about the body of the dancer in prose. Resistant to stable meanings, Fuller dances, according to Julie Townsend, "beyond the available interpretations and definitions. […] No one seemed capable of defining her performance within any of the available categories."[23] Fuller's dancing body elides stable descriptors, moving in and around traditional conceptions of gender, performance, and language. For Mallarmé, the permutations of Fuller's veils and the

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[19] Kermode, "Poet and Dancer Before Diaghilev," 44.
[20] Felicia McCarren, "Stéphane Mallarmé, Loïe Fuller and the Theater of Femininity," in *Bodies of the Text: Dance as Theory, Literature as Dance*, ed. Ellen W. Goellner and Jacqueline Shea Murphy (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 217.
[21] Mallarmé, "Another Study of Dance," 136.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Julie Townsend, "Alchemic Visions and Technological Advances: Sexual Morphology in Loie Fuller's Dance," in *Dancing Desires: Choreographing Sexualities On and Off the Stage*, ed. Jane C. Desmond (University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 78.

gestures of her body both "clear" and "instate" the stage, sweeping away the tired modes of mimetic drama and creating an art that is "all movement" and "pure" expression.[24] Dance is here construed as both the destruction of an old aesthetic order and the building of a new one, importantly represented by the movements of the "veil."[25]

As Rancière argues, Fuller's dance offered poets a "new idea of fiction," changing the conditions of art and its forms of expression, rooting meaning in the body and in its movements through space.[26] Intriguingly, Mallarmé imagines the stage beneath the dancer's feet as another body, possessed of a "spatial virginity," which Fuller alone handles and "make[s] flower."[27] The presentation of the stage as a body of warm flesh awaiting attention and Fuller as a life-bringing force disrupts the writer's earlier portrayal of the dancer as his muse, or as a mere symbol awaiting the poet's creative interpretation. Here, Fuller is the master of the space surrounding her: her dance enlivens the static, untouched body of the theatre, making it blossom through her physical presence. Although Mallarmé does not allow Fuller's body to fully emerge from its metaphorical trappings – she remains a simile, a "figure" – he does imagine her as a creative, rejuvenating force who breathes life into the inert form of the stage. Bringing a warm blush to the "virginal" site beneath her feet, she is also ambivalently gendered, stimulating the ground with her "hard […] points," as she "build[s]' and "make[s]" art, "instituting a place."[28]

This contradictory account reflects the oppositional impulses associated with Salome's veiled dance in Wilde's play and other texts. Mallarmé briefly imagines Fuller's body to be nude, slowly revealed by the gradual "peeling away" of veils, but at the core of her dance, where her body should be, emerges only "a central nothingness, all volition."[29] It is as if her frame has been emptied of its animating force, leaving it "dead" and inert at the centre, while the dance happens *around* it; giving her life – her subjectivity – to the space of the stage, thereby creating a new fiction outside the parameters of the body's performance. It is the body of the woman that remains problematic in Mallarmé's text: where Fuller is given physical meaning,

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[24] For Jones, Mallarmé "shifts the aesthetics of dance away from a tradition of literal representation." See "Une écriture corporelle," 241.

[25] Mallarmé, "Another Study of Dance," 136-137.

[26] Rancière, *Aisthesis*, 100.

[27] Mallarmé, "Another Study of Dance," 136.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid., 137. Auguste Rodin's watercolour of Fuller is one of the few images from the period to imagine her as naked beneath her veils.

it is through a language that frames her as a virile creator enlivening the virginal body of the stage. There is a queerness to her artistry as she is reconceived by Mallarmé in masculine terms, commanding her space in an act of erotic conquest. Yet as a dancing woman, she is also a muse, a "naked statue," and a "dead" centre, whose powerful body remains a source of bewilderment for the poet.

As Tom Gunning notes, "a large part of Fuller's fascination […] lay in this simultaneous bewitching and confounding of the male gaze, […] glimpses of a withheld body and its sublimation into pure form and energy."[30] Mallarmé's response to Fuller shows that this body remained a knotty problem at the heart of his critical appreciation of dance. His writing demonstrates a reluctance to admit to the physical might of the female dancer, who is both the creator and the object of her art. Elsewhere in his critical writings, however, Mallarmé encouraged his contemporaries to see the imaginative potential of dance and its value as a model for literary praxis. In another brief divagation, he praised the choreographic insights of the Belgian Symbolist poet Georges Rodenbach, and compared Rodenbach's writing to the "gauze" of the dancer's costume: "he gathers, lengthens, and creases the cloth, holds it out like living folds."[31] Rodenbach's words are here compared to the luminous materials expertly animated by Loïe Fuller – described in this instance as an "inexhaustible fountain of herself" – and also, of course, to the dance of the seven veils that had become a prevalent image in fin-de-siècle culture, following the 1893 publication of Wilde's *Salomé* in French.[32] Calling upon choreographic imagery to furnish his critique of Rodenbach, Mallarmé subtly reverses the terms of the analogy between text and performance posed in his essays on Fuller and Elena Cornalba. In doing so, he apprehends the qualities of dance as they emerge from the eloquent permutations of the writing in question, arguing for a dance of language rather than a poetics of movement. Mallarmé himself would experiment with the physical properties of language and *mise en scène* in his unfinished project *Livre* (1842-1898), which Kélina Gotman has recently described as a "choreotext." Like Mallarmé's *Hérodiade*, this was an unstaged, perhaps unstageable dramatic work, which

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[30] Tom Gunning, "Loïe Fuller and the Art of Motion: Body, Light, Electricity, and the Origins of the Cinema," in *Camera Obscura, Camera Lucida: Essays in Honour of Annette Michelson*, ed. Annette Michelson, Richard Allen, and Malcolm Turvey (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2003), 84.
[31] Mallarmé, "The Only One Would Have to Be as Fluid," in *Divagations*, 138.
[32] Ibid., 138-139.

nonetheless initiated a form of dance between reader, author, and text.[33]

Rancière was not the first, as he notes, to speak of Fuller as "unlocatable," as it was Georges Rodenbach who used the term "*introuvable*" to describe Fuller's dance in an article for *Le Figaro* on 5 May 1895.[34] For Rodenbach, the figure of the dancer clearly held magnetic promise as a literary subject, although he also dealt in the sinister and misogynistic archetypes that fed Salome's aberrant late nineteenth-century incarnations. In Rodenbach's Symbolist novel *Bruges la Morte* (1892), the widowed aesthete Hugues Viande becomes enchanted with a dancer who bears an unnerving resemblance to his dead wife, around whose image he has formed an all-consuming "cult" of grief. The dancer, Jane, initially appears to the protagonist as a spectral Salome, rising into Hugues's hallucinatory vision in "a blur of white muslin, bridal veils, girls in procession to their first communion."[35] Similar images of veils appear elsewhere to underline the precarious quality of Hugues's perceptions, and to construct a sense of the dancer's opacity as a projection of his morbid psychology. For Hugues, Jane is a Salome-like creature, who possesses that veiled figure's sensuous immorality – "a loose woman […] from the theatre" – but also her pallid coldness: on the stage, she is "a dead woman coming down from the slab of her tomb," who seems to be a faithful resurrection; "truly his dead wife."[36] Strains of Wilde's *Salomé* echo in these lines, and elsewhere, recalling his description of the pale princess and the moon as "dead [women] […] looking for dead things" (*PI*, 707).

In a pivotal scene, Rodenbach's dancer, Jane, both embraces and unsettles these macabre associations as she performs a dance for Hugues while wearing his dead wife's dress: "in a fit of wild exuberance, [she] started to dance with a multiplicity of entrechats, slipping back into the choreography of the stage."[37] Like the Salome depicted in many other nineteenth-century sources, Jane's body is framed here as a fount of disruptive excess, taking on the "polluted, vulgar" semblance of the *femme fatale*. This dancing figure appals Rodenbach's protagonist precisely because she lays bare the extent of his self-deception: Jane, alive and animated where his wife was perfectly still, escapes his aestheticising vision, constructing her own performance.

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[33] Kélina Gotman, "Mallarmé's '*Livre*': Notes towards a Schizotheatre," *Textual Practice* (2017): DOI: 10.1080/0950236X.2017.1308963.

[34] Georges Rodenbach, "Danseuses," *Le Figaro*, May 5, 1896.

[35] Georges Rodenbach, *Bruges La Morte*, trans. Mike Mitchell (Sawtry: Dedalus European Classics, 2005), 40.

[36] Ibid., 80; 46.

[37] Ibid., 69.

Much as Salome's dance communicates her resistance to the petrifying gaze of the aesthete (in Wilde's play as well as in her many stage afterlives), Jane's dance is an expression of her creative power, performed by an alert, mobile body that evades Hugues's attempts to consecrate it as a *memento mori*. Echoing the conclusion of Wilde's *Salomé*, however, the final moments of *Bruges la Morte* consider the outcomes of masculine violence, as Hugues exacts a brutal revenge on his dancer, strangling her with his deceased wife's hair, which he has kept in a glass casket. After dancing beyond the fixed, paralysing vision Hugues accords to her, it is the moving body of Jane that is cruelly immobilised and conquered by the pernicious control of the aesthete. Fuller and other modern dancers interrogated and sought to alter precisely this kind of representational framework with their choreographic innovations and approaches to the figure of Salome.

As Mallarmé, Rodenbach, and Rancière strain to recognise in their various accounts of dance, Fuller developed a corporeal aesthetics that elevated the dancer's work from its prosaic conditions and the more restrictive forms of the ballet, granting the dancing body a capacity for transformation. This radical approach signals Fuller's place at the forefront of a modernism "characterized," in Tim Armstrong's words, "by the desire to intervene in the body; to render it part of modernity," although her serpentine dance was not merely preoccupied with the "fragmentation and augmentation of the body in relation to technology," but also with the body co-opting technology to enlarge the effects of both, mutating the human form out into the world of artifice.[38] Fuller's choreographic innovations enhanced her body's capacities through the use of stage effects and lighting, but, as Mallarmé seems to recognise in his essay, Fuller also transformed the technologized space around her into an embodied entity, itself part of the dance. It is in this sense that "movement itself becomes," as Franko asserts, "a modernist object."[39] By suggesting her body's potential to transfer its sensory and particularly its kinaesthetic effects beyond skeletal constraints, Fuller tapped into the literary and cultural formations concentrated around the vexed status of the body of the dancer, which took on related forms in the work of Mallarmé, Wilde, and other artists of the fin-de-siècle, particularly in relation to Salome.

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[38] Armstrong, *Modernism, Technology and the Body*, 6; 3.
[39] Franko, *Dancing Modernism/ Performing Politics*, x-xi.

Loïe Fuller's Vanishing Form

Even before she choreographed her own version of the Salome dance, Loïe Fuller was commonly associated with this figure in the popular imagination, likely as a result of their shared predilection for veiled dances. As one commentator put it, "Loie Fuller is full of the idea of Salome. She talks Salome; almost thinks Salome."[40] Recalling in part the skirt dances that filled Parisian music halls during the 1890s, Fuller transformed the veil into her central choreographic motif, making it a billowing, amorphous extension of her body rather than a mere element of her costume (Fig. 4). As such, her dances differed entirely from the stripteases that came to shape Salome's legacy in the popular music hall repertoire. Figured in the press as an innocent and asexual alternative to the *femme fatale* whose image she seemed to invoke through her affiliation with Salome, Fuller's modern choreographies deployed a visual rhetoric of veiling that made her body elusive and sexually ambiguous, whilst producing the hypnotic effects suggested by the trance-like states of Wilde's characters in *Salomé*.[41] Her serpentine dance was not structured around the removal of the veil and the exposure of a hidden body, but rather the creative collusion between these forms to *produce* images, placing the dancer's body behind a continuously unfolding screen of illuminated materials. The intricate web of influences and artistic concerns concentrated around the figure of Salome and the development of modern dance draws Wilde and Fuller into close proximity, and Katharine Worth has even suggested that Wilde may have had Fuller's costumes in mind when he described his Salome as clothed in "green, like a curious, poisonous lizard."[42]

Fuller's performances explored the veil's dramatic potential as an object but they were far removed from more obviously erotic forms of dance that have become familiar in the context of Salome's story. "Loïe Fuller's body," argues Dana Mills, "inscribed on the veil and made it communicate, thus giving it a place in the history of modernist aesthetics."[43] Apparently transfixed by the way her outline flickered

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[40] Unidentified journalist, quoted in Garelick, *Electric Salome*, 120.

[41] Fuller's serpentine dance was created during a hypnotism scene in the play *Quack, M.D.* Garelick also discusses Fuller's "longstanding notion of herself as not just a performer, but a *hypnotizer*, a supernatural force." See *Electric Salome*. 22. See also Felicia McCarren, "The 'Symptomatic Act' circa 1900: Hysteria, Hypnosis, Electricity, Dance," *Critical Enquiry* 21 (1995): 748-774.

[42] Katharine Worth, *Oscar Wilde* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1983), 64-65.

[43] Mills, "Rancière, Dance, Politics," 488.

"Loïe Fuller, full-length portrait, standing, facing front; raising her very long gown in shape of a butterfly." ca. 1902. Library of Congress: Prints and Photographs Division. LC-USZ62-90931.

beneath the more substantial presence of the materials, reviewers of Fuller's performances offered accounts that repeatedly insisted upon her body's disappearance. "Now Loïe Fuller swoops around, turning, her skirt swelling and enclosing her like a flower's calyx," wrote Roger Marx in 1893.[44] The terms used to describe Fuller by spectators and reviewers often betrayed a sense of wonder at the quasi-spiritual quality of her dance, coupled with an appreciation for her technological wizardry. Townsend has argued that Fuller's use of "technological effects, the effacement of her body, and the impersonality of her performance prefigured modernist concerns with the decentred or impersonal subject," and a related interest in mechanised bodies.[45] Where Marx saw a flower, others saw a butterfly, a fairy, and a "gigantic screw."[46] The final metaphor suggests an intimate correspondence between Fuller's dancing form and the images of machines at work that flooded twentieth-century literary culture, which can be traced through the recurring fascination with marionettes, dolls, and automatons demonstrated by a range of writers and filmmakers. As scholars including McCarren have reasoned, critics and practitioners of dance during this period borrowed elements of industry's rhetorical index, since "dance offers ways of thinking both about the movement possible with machines and about machines moving themselves."[47]

Fuller's stage innovations influenced filmmakers including Thomas Edison, Georges Méliès, and the Lumière brothers, and her choreographic style incorporated mechanical registers that struck a chord with the technological aesthetics of the period.[48] She was known as "*la fée éléctricité*," and she experimented with radium, carbon-arc lights, and phosphorescent salts to produce unearthly shows of intermingled lights and colours.[49] As Jones has observed, however, despite the "apparent sensuousness of her performances," Fuller's "self-presentation as an artist was curiously un-eroticised and focused on the spiritual qualities and naturalism of her self-expression."[50] In her autobiography, *Fifteen Years of a Dancer's Life* (1913), Fuller claimed to have "discovered" her serpentine dance in Chicago during the

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[44] Roger Marx, quoted in Albright, *Traces of Light*, 42.
[45] Townsend, "Alchemic Visions and Technological Advances," 78-79.
[46] Albright cites these reviews in *Traces of Light*, 20; 26.
[47] McCarren, *Dancing Machines*, 5.
[48] Gunning claims that "the magical and illogical transformations" of early filmmaking "exhibits the syntax of Fuller's constant metamorphoses out of a matrix of movement." See "Loïe Fuller and the Art of Motion," 85-86.
[49] Banes, *Dancing Women*, 69-70. Garelick, *Electric Salome*, 6.
[50] Jones, "'Une écriture corporelle," 240.

rehearsals for a play called *Quack, M.D.* in 1890. Her account emphasises the spontaneity of her choreographic creations – indeed, she claims that her body moved "unconsciously," following a path of its own instinctive making. "Gently, almost religiously, I set the silk in motion," she declares; "I saw that I had obtained undulations of a character heretofore unknown. I had created a new dance."[51] In opposition to the rigour of the ballet with its established vocabulary of gestures and positions, Fuller's dance practice was contingent on a sense of spiritual feeling and a deep concern for the expression of movement for its own sake.[52] Indeed, Fuller set movement in opposition to language, and asserted that "motion has been the starting point of all effort at self-expression, and it is faithful to nature."[53] According to Garelick, the essential place of movement in Fuller's art muted the cultural and physical particularities of her dance, "dissolv[ing] the shape of her body into a whirl of fabric and light," and rendering her "a force of performativity itself, mutating into vast and ephemeral decorative forms."[54]

Although this interpretation affirms the centrality of organic, spontaneous motion to Fuller's choreographic technique, Garelick reverts to the narrative of disappearance and dissolution so often attached to the dancer's body, which this chapter has critiqued. Rancière adopts a similar critical stance in his reading of Fuller, stating that the "new art" she instates "comes from a new body, relieved of the weight of its flesh, reduced to a play of lines and tones, whirling in space."[55] One might surmise from these statements that the physical properties of the dancer's body – her strong bones, perspiring skin, and straining muscles – are incompatible with the delicate "lines" of the art she creates, suggesting that the dance emerges, ethereal, *despite* the exertions of her definable physique. Yet this is precisely where critics conflate the performance effects of Fuller's art with the performance itself, declaring her body to be absent when it in fact only appears to have vanished behind her veils. In response to Rancière, Mills argues that "[t]he dancer's ability to develop a technique that enables her body to appear unlocatable is her vocation," and so whilst "[t]he body may be perceived as without a space, […] it is a perception that arises through the

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[51] Loïe Fuller, *Fifteen Years of a Dancer's Life: With Some Account of her Distinguished Friends* (Boston, MA: Maynard & Co., 1913), 33.
[52] For Fuller, this was a feminist issue, and she criticised ballet's attempts to control the female body, declaring that any practice that "deforms the body an iota should not, cannot be justified as art." Fuller, quoted in Garelick, *Electric Salome*, 120.
[53] Fuller, *Fifteen Years*, 72.
[54] Garelick, *Electric Salome*, 34.
[55] Rancière, *Aisthesis*, 94.

dancer's manipulation of her body spatiality."[56] With her dynamic, working body at the centre of her silk cocoon, Fuller deliberately orchestrates her own vanishing point in order to rewrite her body's limits, rendering the veil "not a supplement to the body but an extension of its movement."[57] This is where Fuller contributes to the changing conditions of dance as an art form, not through the eradication of her presence, as some critics have suggested, but through the reinvention of her spatial frontiers, collapsing the distinction between skin and veil.

Fuller's style absorbed forms of movement derived from new technologies, but she also harked back to more traditional narrative modes and symbols: according to Garelick, her choreographies combined "a sleek, impersonal mechanomorphic modernism […] and a Romantic, dreamy, somewhat naïve painterliness, incorporating motifs borrowed from nature, fairytales, mythology, and drama."[58] Fuller's dancing body was also apprehended using the sort of distancing, mystifying terms that Castle recognizes as endemic in the history of queer female representation. The following reviewer expressed his astonishment that this creature of metamorphosis could be human beneath her veils:

> Again she emerges from the darkness, her airy evaluations now tinted with blue and purple and crimson, and again the audience rise at her and insist on seeing her pretty, piquant face before they can believe that the lovely apparition is really a woman.[59]

It is the profound ambiguity of Fuller's bodily self, hinted at in such accounts, that has led a number of scholars to consider her performance style as articulating a queer subjectivity. Using Teresa de Lauretis's concept of a "technology of gender," which posits gender as "the product of various social technologies […] and institutionalized discourses," Townsend has read Fuller's experiments with stage effects and movement styles as probing into the interplays between technology, gender, and sexuality, arguing that Fuller's "lesbian identity and her work as an artist […] are inextricably linked."[60] In a similar vein, Tirza True Latimer claims that Fuller "staged a presence that was

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[56] Mills, "Rancière, Dance, Politics," 487.
[57] Ibid., 488.
[58] Garelick, *Electric Salome*, 32.
[59] Anonymous reviewer, quoted in Gunning, "Loïe Fuller and the Art of Motion," 79.
[60] Teresa de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender*, 2; Townsend, "Alchemic Visions and Technological Advances," 74.

specifically lesbian."[61] By withholding her body from the gaze of her spectators, Fuller, it might be reasoned, retreated from a space of known or conventional erotic possibility, orchestrating her dance from the very site of physical absence and invisibility in which queer female sexuality was imagined to take place.

In this sense, there are connections to be drawn between Fuller's subtle choreographing of sexual "otherness," and the literary and artistic traditions that represented Salome as a figure imbued with heterodox sexual meaning. According to Dierkes-Thrun, in many Western portrayals of Salome and of Wilde, "transgressions of the female body – both the straight one and […] the lesbian or bisexual one – intersect with those of the male homosexual body."[62] The kind of queer reading Fuller invites perhaps sits between the thresholds of these different identities, retaining a sense of the multiple forms of desire and intimacy that collate in Salome's dancing body, a force of ambiguous gender and longing. Indeed, Fuller herself proposed a suggestive connection between her dance technique and her relationship with Gabrielle Bloch, writing in her autobiography: "I wonder if her friendship, so well founded and positive, is not intimately mingled with the love of form, of colour and of light, which I interpreted synthetically before her eyes when I appeared to her for the first time."[63] Muting any obvious erotic content, this recollection nonetheless stirs with queer possibility, evoking a relationship of intimate mingling between bodily forms, prompted by an almost epiphanic apparition of colour and light.

While some scholars have objected to queer interpretations of Fuller's dance that dismiss the importance of her body and render "lesbian sexuality an absence, a refusal of eros," it is possible to read Fuller back into her choreographies on her own terms.[64] Fuller conceptualised dance as a sensual enactment of inner feeling, but also as a means of staging the single body's expansive connectedness among other bodies, phenomena, and aesthetic forms. She imagines herself as a plastic "interpreter" of the lines, colours, and lights that frame and define her dance, thereby decoding the language of the stage for her spectators using her body, and also perhaps the language of queer intimacy for her female partner. This is the kind of double function that

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[61] Tirza True Latimer, "Loie Fuller: Butch Femme Fatale," *Proceedings of the Society of Dance History Scholars, 22nd Annual Conference* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1999), 86.

[62] Dierkes-Thrun, *Salome's Modernity*, 10.

[63] Fuller, *Fifteen Years*, 266.

[64] Garelick, *Electric Salome*, 10. Albright also doubts the value of such queer interpretations, criticising the "reductive reading of the equation of performance with life" (*Traces of Light*, 123). Her response misconstrues the value of this kind of project by perceiving its aim to be purely biographical, rather than a powerful challenge to dominant modes of interpretation and spectatorship.

Salome's veiled dance imaginatively permits, and it is telling that so many of the women who were drawn to Salome in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were queer or at least perceived in such terms.[65] The "apparitional" nature of Fuller's dance – read in some cases as signalling a queer aesthetic – was crucially engineered by her body, which operated as a powerful interpretative instrument constructing the choreography along with its many possible sexual meanings.

Salome: An Unhappy Acrobat

When Fuller first travelled to Paris in 1892, after performing with various touring groups and shows in the US, she arrived in a city already thoroughly preoccupied with the image of Salome.[66] The Decadent flourishes of Flaubert, Huysmans, and Moreau, along with rumours of Wilde's indecent play, had stimulated a cultural fascination with this oriental dancer, whetted by Western Europe's broader imperial ambitions, and the risqué performances of popular dancers at the Moulin Rouge and similar venues.[67] Following on from the immediate success of her serpentine dance, which revitalised the potential of veiled choreographies, it seemed certain that Fuller would make an innovative contribution to this catalogue of Salomes. Indeed, it was upon witnessing Fuller's serpentine dance that the French poet Armand Silvestre encouraged her to adapt the dance of Salome, declaring when he saw her: "I dreamed of Salome before Herod."[68]

Fuller did not delay in satisfying this particular vision. Her first *Salomé* opened in early March 1895 at the Comédie Parisienne. For this self-styled *"pantomime lyrique,"* Fuller worked with the set designer Georges Rochegrosse, the composer Gabriel Pierné, who wrote the score, and the librettist C. H. Meltzer. The production was structured as four tableaux, designed to convey the altering tones and mood of the biblical tale, as Salome relinquishes her initial chastity and dances for Herod in a futile

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[65] Maud Allan, to whom I return in this chapter, is a key example, but the opera singer Mary Garden, the actor Alla Nazimova, and the writers Michael Field, Djuna Barnes, and Claude Cahun responded, in various ways, to the story of Salome, and were also entangled in the history of lesbian literature and performance.

[66] Garelick has described Fuller's experiences touring with William "Buffalo Bill" Cody's *Wild West Show* in the 1880s, and her experiments dancing with light and veils while playing the title role in *Aladdin's Wonderful Lamp* in 1887. See *Electric Salome*, 24-27.

[67] Arthur Symons celebrated the Moulin Rouge dancer Jane Avril in his poem "La Mélinite: Moulin Rouge," which emphasises her "morbid, vague, ambiguous grace," reminiscent of Mallarmé's *Hérodiade*, and the dancers in Wilde's "The Harlot's House." See Symons, *Selected Writings*, 41.

[68] "Miss Fuller's New Dance," *New York Times*, January 24, 1896, ProQuest.

attempt to save the life of the Baptist. While Fuller's serpentine dances had emphasised her singular, luminous presence on an otherwise deserted stage, this *Salomé* was a lavish production, influenced perhaps by the symbolism of Moreau and Wilde.[69] The *New York Times* hailed it as "the talk of Europe" and reported that it was "a marvel of beauty and grace."[70] Fuller's "Fire Dance," incorporated into one of the tableaux, was a particular success, and, like her serpentine dance, it depended upon her technological ambition: six holes were cut into the stage and overlaid with glass, and lights were then projected onto Fuller's dancing body from below.[71] As for the style of her movements, Fuller herself described the choreography to the *Chicago Tribune* as "not new. It is the old dance of Bible times."[72] It appears that Fuller was eager to root her approach to Salome's dance in the biblical sources rather than more recent literary versions, although she did draw out the sublime, hypnotic strains suggested by Wilde and others, declaring, "I can fairly feel the awful horror of the thing, then I move in a dazed way through that frightful dance." According to the journalist who interviewed Fuller, this involved her circling the room "in a slow, weird manner."[73]

Fuller's measured, deliberate movement vocabulary recalls the "stylized, hieratic gestures" Sarah Bernhardt imagined for her cancelled production of *Salomé*, disavowing the erotic gyrations of the striptease to make the woman's body a source of remote and portentous action. This complex operation was also, in Fuller's words, entirely of her own making:

> I am not going to do "Salome" here [in New York]. I couldn't; there isn't time enough. It would take a month to get the stage ready for it, and I should have to spend weeks training the auxiliaries. It takes seventy-five people to do it. [...] I want you to understand that the dances are all my own. [...] in my own dances the gas man can't do anything until I teach him how. I invented the dances myself, every one of them.[74]

As this statement suggests, Fuller was a thoughtful interpreter of her own creative process, and she repeatedly underlined her role as the single orchestrator of her creative projects. She cast herself as the star talent in *Salomé*, of course, but also as a

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[69] Albright, *Traces of Light,* 126; Tydeman and Price, *Wilde: Salome*, 138.
[70] "Miss Fuller's New Dance."
[71] Ibid. Albright also discusses the set for the "Fire Dance" in *Traces of Light*, 126.
[72] "La Loïe in Perihelion," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 12, 1896, ProQuest.
[73] Ibid.
[74] "Coming Back to Dance," *New York Tribune*, February 23, 1896, ProQuest.

teacher, who "[left] nothing to chance. I drill my light men, drill them to throw the light so, or so." Under Fuller's direction, the movements of the stage crew were strictly choreographed, and "they [had] to do their business with the exactitude of clockwork."[75] Implicit in these reflections is a strong sense that Fuller was not merely interested in painting herself as a celebrity performer, but in expanding the remit of the female dancer to encompass the roles of choreographer, director, and pedagogue as well.

There was a gap of twelve years between Fuller's dynamic and stylistically experimental *Salomé* dance, and her second attempt at the same theme: *La Tragédie de Salomé* (1907). This production was set to a score by Florent Schmitt and a libretto by Robert d'Humières, and, according to Toni Bentley, it was "in keeping with Wilde's vision of Salomé as a hypnotic, sexually compelling and compulsive new woman."[76] Certainly, the costumes and set design were fantastic: Fuller emerged onto the stage like a peacock, resplendent in more than four thousand real feathers, while the severed head of John glowed eerily, bathed in the light of six hundred lamps.[77] Yet for the writer and director Jules Claretie, it was not an exotic, sexualized body that emerged from Salome's veils, but rather the body of an expressive artist, "whose hands – mobile, expressive, tender or threatening hands, white hands, hands like the tips of bird's wings – emerged from the clothes, imparted to them all the poetry of the dance."[78] By rooting the meaning of Fuller's movements in the instrumental power of her hands, Claretie recognised Fuller's presence as the author and creator of the performance: she was not the erotic object of the dance, to be dissected as a composite of almost bared flesh, but rather, the maker of her art, tracing symbols in the air with her beautiful gestures.

Moreover, in Claretie's opinion, Fuller's decision to adapt the dance of Salome was not merely a case of aesthetic suitability, but of "destiny." Writing of her rehearsals for the 1907 production, he observed:

> I can well believe that Loie Fuller's Salome is destined to add a Salome unforeseen of all the Salomes we have been privileged to see. […] This woman, who has so profoundly influenced the modes, the tones of materials, has discovered still further effects, and I can imagine the picturesqueness of the movements when she envelops herself with the black serpents which she

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[75] "'La Loie' Talks of Her Art," *New York Times*, March 1, 1896, ProQuest.
[76] Bentley, *Sisters of Salome*, 44.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Jules Claretie, quoted in Albright, *Traces of Light*, 139.

used the other evening only among the accessories behind the scenes.[79]

Claretie's praise, celebrating Fuller's fondness for striking props and effects, also alludes to the serpentine metaphors long associated with both Fuller and the figure of Salome. The serpentine dance, for instance, denotes particular forms of movement: fluid, sinuous metamorphoses rather than sharp angles and distinct gestures. Yet the term "serpentine" also recalls Wilde's sardonic reference to Sarah Bernhardt as "that serpent of Old Nile," invoking her famous performance as Cleopatra, and the Medusan subtexts associated with both this asp-bitten Egyptian Queen and her Decadent counterpart Salome.

"Serpentine" further, as Rancière suggests, "illustrates a certain idea of the body and what makes for its aesthetic potential: the curved line," and it is a key term in aesthetic philosophy.[80] Edmund Burke, whose work Rancière discusses in this context, considered the "varied line" to be the structural principle of beautiful forms, building on William Hogarth's identification of the serpentine "line of beauty" in his *Analysis of Beauty* (1753). In a familiar rhetorical manoeuvre, however, Burke illustrated his theory of the varied line with recourse to the image of a woman's naked skin:

> Observe that part of a beautiful woman where she is perhaps most beautiful, about the neck and breasts; the smoothness; the softness; the easy and insensible swell; the variety of the surface, which is never for the smallest space the same; the deceitful maze, through which the unsteady eye slides giddily, without knowing where to fix, or whither it is carried. Is not this a demonstration of that change of surface continual and yet hardly perceptible at any point which forms one of the great constituents of beauty?[81]

Burke's writing on the serpentine line anticipates Symbolist approaches to the figure of Salome, imagining the elusive body of the woman in movement to be a source of disruptive and decadent beauty. This surface of infinite variety is, for Burke, the epitome of serpentine beauty, but his writing also lends this body an unruly quality. It is a "deceitful maze," designed to unsettle the "giddy" spectator who cannot contain its restless form with a single look. Indeed, the body of the woman is here framed as a resistant and unconquerable territory, eliding the colonising impulses of

[79] This is taken from an article Claretie wrote for *Le Temps*, which Fuller cites extensively in her autobiography. See *Fifteen Years*, 288.

[80] Rancière, *Aisthesis*, 95.

[81] Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. Paul Guyer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 93.

the lustful viewer with her oceanic swells and variform geography.

It was in this aesthetic model that Fuller interceded with her interpretations of the Salome myth. As Ann Cooper Albright observes, Fuller's Salome dances in 1895 and 1907 demonstrated "different feminist [strategies] for confronting and intervening in misogynist representations of sexualised women."[82] Albright recognizes that the subject of Salome may have seemed an unusual choice for Fuller at this moment in her career, since it invoked a recent tradition of carnal desire and female powerlessness in the face of violence firmly at odds with the reputation she had built as a dancer. Yet it was precisely this characterization of Salome that Fuller construed differently, in her first performance particularly, which diffused the erotic energy of the dance and presented Salome's love of John the Baptist as a form of deep loyalty motivated by religious feeling and self-sacrifice.

In this sense, Fuller's work signals a critical shift in nineteenth-century approaches to Salome. Asserting her authority over every aspect of the show and evading the *femme fatale* archetype through a careful revision of the role, Fuller forged strong associations between the figure of Salome and that of the modern dancer as a creator, rather than the object of a spectacle. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this interpretation of the biblical tale was not to the taste of all of her spectators, and the comments of the writer Jean Lorrain in particular have fed the widely accepted notion that her 1895 *Salomé* was a failure.[83] In a scathing review, Lorrain emphasised the physicality of Fuller's performance, which, unlike her serpentine dance, allowed her body to partially emerge from its veils: "One perceives too late that the unhappy acrobat is neither mime nor dancer; heavy, ungraceful, sweating [...] she manoeuvres her veils and her mass of materials like a laundress misusing her paddle."[84] Lorrain magnifies the details of Fuller's exertions, noting her weight and her perspiring skin. Here, the "unlocatable" body is firmly discovered, but it is framed as an object of excess – of disgust – rather than the delicate, unfixable form praised by other reviewers. Although recent work, by Albright in particular, has done much to revise the history of Fuller's first *Salomé*, it is possible to read Lorrain's comments here against his own literary representations of female bodies in his fiction, thereby

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[82] Albright, *Traces of Light*, 116.
[83] This narrative has been comprehensively challenged by Albright, who draws on a wealth of historical reports and reviews to paint a more balanced picture of the critical response. See *Traces of Light*, 125-134.
[84] Jean Lorrain, quoted in Ibid., 127.

illuminating the misogynistic complex colouring his response to Fuller's choreography. His horrified reaction to Fuller's *Salomé* was embedded in broader sexual discourses framing the bodies of dancing women, which Lorrain had already addressed in his fictional accounts of physically demonstrative, sensual women with a fondness for technological spectacle.

Lorrain, a dandy, morphine user, and absinthe drinker, was a member of the French coterie of artists and writers who experimented with Decadent aesthetics in their work – a circle that included Wilde, whose *Picture of Dorian Gray* Lorrain emulated in his novel *Monsieur de Phocas* (1902).[85] In his short story "Magic Lantern" (1891), Lorrain muses at length on the dangerous, alluring prevalence of "the Fantastic" in modern life, which "invades us, chokes us, and obsesses us[.]" This trope, for Lorrain, is deeply connected to late nineteenth-century spiritual and medical concerns about "Hypnotism, magnetism, suggestion and hysteria," embodied by Charcot's female patients at the Salpêtrière: "the wild women who stretch themselves out on their hands and merrily make hoops of themselves."[86] Framing these "hysterical" women as dancers, or acrobats stretched in strange contortions, Lorrain recalls the gymnastic pose of Flaubert's Salome in "Hérodias," which in turn invokes the medieval carving of Salome dancing on her hands at the Cathedral of Rouen. These allusions to the biblical dancer intensify in Lorrain's portrayal of an enchanted audience at a magic lantern show: he focuses on "an exquisite young woman" who, with the sinister intent of a modern Salome, "never misses an execution" and "shivers with profound sensuality every time she sees the fall of a severed head – eternally young though, as if kept fresh by the sight of blood!"[87]

Lorrain's eccentric interweaving of the magic lantern exhibition and the lustful, vampiric *femme fatale* figure exploits the very connections between technology and misogynistic representations of the female body that Fuller challenged so creatively in her choreographies and in her revision of the Salome narrative. Popular conceptions of female self-expression as a dangerous and modern spectacle – evident in Lorrain's work – also shaped the emerging relationship between hysteria and photography, reflected in Charcot's eagerness to capture and display photographs of

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[85] Intriguingly, it was at Lorrain's home in Paris that Oscar Wilde allegedly came across a sculpture of a decapitated female head, which called to his mind the story of John the Baptist and inspired his own version of the Salome myth. Tydeman and Price, *Wilde: Salome*, 15.

[86] Jean Lorrain, "Magic Lantern," in *Late Victorian Gothic Tales*, ed. Roger Luckhurst (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 172.

[87] Ibid., 175.

his female patients at his famous Tuesday lectures.[88] These modes of thought also run through the English psychologist Havelock Ellis's work *Man and Woman* (1894), in which he insists that dance is a symptom of deeper female instability: "One reason women love dancing is very probably because it enables them to give harmonious and legitimate emotional expression to this neuro-muscular irritability which might otherwise escape in more explosive forms."[89] Clearly, Lorrain's critique of Fuller's *Salomé* was part of a complex landscape of nineteenth-century psychological theories and practices, in which suspicions of the female body ran deep.

Fuller was certainly embroiled in the mechanics of the modern spectacle described in Lorrain's "Magic Lantern," but, as Catherine Hindson has shown, although "illusion formed part of the fabric of [fin-de-siècle] performance," Fuller was often represented as "a creation, an illusion," rather than the illusionist orchestrating the act.[90] There were, however, a number of critics who recognised the extent of Fuller's creative autonomy. Claretie, for instance, celebrated Fuller as "a unique personality, an independent creator, a revolutionist in art," whose work was not merely aesthetically distinct, but politically transformative. Enthusing about the rehearsals for her second Salome dance, he wrote:

> I had, as it were, a vision of a theatre of the future, something of the nature of a feministic theatre.
> Women are more and more taking men's places. They are steadily supplanting the so-called stronger sex. […] Just watch and you will see women growing in influence and power; and if, as in Gladstone's phrase, the nineteenth century was the working-man's century, the twentieth will be the women's century.[91]

This is a powerful statement on the effects of Fuller's choreographic interventions. It is worth noting that Fuller quotes at length from this article in her autobiography, suggesting that she was eager to emphasise the political elements of her praxis, therefore engaging in a revealing self-fashioning that illuminates much about her particular relationship to the figure of Salome. For Claretie, her technological accomplishments and bewitching spectacles rendered her a force of singular creative

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[88] For a cultural history of hysteria, see Georges Didi-Hubermann, *Invention of Hysteria: Charcot and the Photographic Iconography of the Salpêtrière*, trans. Alisa Hartz (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004).
[89] Havelock Ellis, *Man and Woman: A Study of Human Secondary Sexual Characters* (London: Walter Scott Ltd., 1894), 307.
[90] Catherine Hindson, "The Female Illusionist—Loie Fuller: Fairy or Wizardess?" *Early Popular Visual Culture* 4 (2006): 161;165.
[91] Jules Claretie, quoted in *Fifteen Years*, 282.

authority, whose work crucially redefined the place of women in theatre, and in political life more widely.

Tellingly, of all the performers Fuller admired, Sarah Bernhardt was the one she sought to emulate most keenly. In *Fifteen Years of a Dancer's Life*, she recalls watching Bernhardt performing in New York when she was only sixteen years old. Her breathless prose reformulates the descriptive style that was so common in reviews of her own choreographies, as she imagines Bernhardt's body as curiously weightless and unearthly: "She came forward lightly, appearing barely to brush the earth."[92] This "lightness" does not, however, minimise the impact of Bernhardt's powerful stage presence; on the contrary, Fuller recalls how the French actor advanced to the "middle of the stage, and surveyed this audience of actors."[93] Looking decisively at her audience (composed of dancers and performers), Bernhardt unsettles the demarcations of the theatrical space, dismantling her own position as the object of the audience's gaze and subjecting them to a critical dissection of her own. Capturing this transformative moment of kinaesthetic affinity between two pioneers of the nineteenth-century stage, Fuller's autobiography is an important record of the theatrical space enabling a potent exchange between women. Her writing destabilises any straightforward understanding of the spectator's gaze in either Bernhardt's performances or, moreover, Fuller's choreographies, which were perhaps influenced by the elder French actor's carefully contrived "lightness"; her ease of movement.[94]

Fuller's account suggests a corporeal symmetry between herself and Bernhardt, another inheritor of Salome's legacy, reflecting extant discourses surrounding the kinaesthetic effects of modern dance and the role of the viewer in such performances. In her landmark essay on "The Female Dancer and the Male Gaze," Susan Manning addressed debates in dance studies about "the degree to which successive generations of modern dancers have realized the potential of their practice to undermine the voyeuristic gaze."[95] Acknowledging that many early twentieth-century modern dancers, including Maud Allan and Ruth St. Denis (both of whom

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[92] Fuller, *Fifteen Years,* 91.

[93] Ibid.

[94] Fuller was not the only female performer to be struck by Bernhardt's unearthly appearance and style of movement. Ellen Terry used extraordinary metaphors to describe Bernhardt in her memoir, declaring her "transparent as an azalea, only more so; like a cloud, only not so thick." See Ellen Terry, *The Story of My Life: Recollections and Reflections* (New York: Doubleday, 1908), 237.

[95] Susan Manning, "The Female Dancer and the Male Gaze: Feminist Critiques of Early Modern Dance," in *Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies of Dance*, ed. Jane C Desmond (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 154.

danced as Salome), reproduced essentialist visions of gender and race in their dances, Manning nonetheless argues that the kinaesthetic element of these choreographies provided an escape from the voyeuristic gaze, creating an empowering space for the female spectator.

This tension is manifest, moreover, in Fuller's adaptations of the Salome myth, which naturally drew on a representational frame grounded in the essentialist visions of women formed in nineteenth-century portraits of the figure, whereas the kinaesthetic elements of her choreographies disturbed such gendered modes, reinventing Salome on different terms. Noting a "dynamic tension underlying the form of early modern dance," Manning perceives a dissonance between "representational frames [that] reiterated and updated preexistent images of gender and […] the kinesthetic dimension [that] introduced a new image of the female body in motion."[96] Fuller and her contemporaries in modern dance also developed grammars of movement that drew on styles and methods of physical expression such as Delsartism, which were, as Preston has persuasively shown, deeply integrated into popular conceptions of health and wellbeing, early feminist politics, and modernist aesthetics in the twentieth century.[97]

The connections Manning and Preston draw in their work between kinaesthetic experience and gender politics are shored up by Fuller's own reflections on her developing practice. In her autobiography, Fuller intimated that her career was modelled in part on that of her "idol" Bernhardt, who was of course famously embroiled in the early controversy surrounding *Salomé* and Wilde's trials. Fuller enthused repeatedly about Bernhardt in interviews and recalled an occasion when Bernhardt saw her perform at the Folies Bergère: "I danced and, although she could not know, I danced for her. I forgot everything else. I lived again through the famous day in New York, and I seemed to see her once more, marvellous as she was at the matinee."[98] Even when their roles are reversed, Fuller recasts herself as a spectator to Bernhardt's performance, and imaginatively entwines her choreographic technique with her memory of Bernhardt's movements. At the sight of the French actor in the audience, the historic moment of kinaesthetic empathy returns to Fuller, merging her own dancing with the image of her idol and thus creating an intense sensory connection between the two women, built around their shared role as spectators to

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[96] Manning, "The Female Dancer and the Male Gaze," 164.
[97] Preston, *Modernism's Mythic Pose,* 11-14.
[98] Fuller, *Fifteen Years*, 92.

each other's performances. It is fascinating that Salome should act as a formative model for both of these performers, whose ideas and methods of movement enabled a freer kind of female body to emerge on stage.

Dancing for Women?: Maud Allan's *Vision*

Although Fuller is widely considered to be the first modern dancer to choreograph the role of Salome, she was by no means the last, or, indeed, the most famous. By the time she began preparing *La Tragédie de Salomé* in 1907, Salome's transformation into a transatlantic cultural phenomenon was already well underway. That same year, the New York Theatre opened a "School for Salomes," preparing its dancers to take Wilde's notorious princess onto the vaudeville circuit.[99] Perhaps unsurprisingly, the conspicuous arrival of Salome on American soil instilled a sense of outrage in more conservative quarters: the actor Marie Cahill penned angry letters to President Roosevelt and others, warning that "pernicious subjects of the 'Salome' kind" would poison the minds of impressionable theatregoers.[100] As Lois Cucullu has shown, Wilde's *Salomé* "spawn[ed] an entire industry that, under the banner of Salomania, attract[ed] and produc[ed] willing converts on and off stage and screen" on an unprecedented scale.[101]

One of the triggers for Salome's surge in popularity during this period was the success of the Canadian performer Maud Allan. A number of scholars have excavated the history of Allan's solo dance *The Vision of Salome* and the subsequent scandal surrounding her libel trial in 1918, when she was also set to play the lead role in J. T. Grein's production of Wilde's *Salomé*.[102] In a very different vein to Loïe Fuller, whose choreographies have been coded as queer in later academic expositions, Allan's dancing body was often interpreted at the time as a site of sexual ambiguity, "just as Wilde's queer body was read and traced in hindsight through his aesthetic creed."[103]

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[99] Davinia Caddy, "Variations on the Dance of the Seven Veils," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 17 (2005): 37.
[100] "The Salome Dance Gets into Politics," *New York Times,* August 24, 1908, ProQuest.
[101] Cucullu, "Wilde and Wilder Salomés," 497.
[102] See, for example: Lucy Bland, "Trial by Sexology?: Maud Allan, *Salome* and the 'Cult of the Clitoris' Case," in *Sexology in Culture: Labelling Bodies and Desires*, ed. Lucy Bland and Laura Doan (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 183-198; Bentley, "Part II. Maud Allan: The Cult of the Clitoris," in *Sisters of Salome*, 47-84; Judith R. Walkowitz, "The 'Vision of Salome': Cosmopolitanism and Erotic Dancing in Central London 1908-1918," *The American Historical Review* 108 (2003): 337-376; Amy Koritz, "Dancing the Orient for England: Maud Allan's 'The Vision of Salome'," *Theatre Journal* 46 (1994): 63-78.
[103] Dierkes-Thrun, *Salome's Modernity*, 96.

It was widely believed, for instance, that her Sapphic influence extended into the highest echelons of political life: rumours abounded that she was the lover of Margot Asquith, wife to the British Prime Minister Herbert Asquith. For this reason, her *Vision of Salome,* which premiered in Vienna's Carl-Theatre in 1906, stimulated ideas about Salome's potential as both a progressive and a revolutionary icon, emblematic of contemporaneous political movements such as the struggle for women's suffrage, and alternative conceptions of femininity previously embodied by the image of the New Woman.

Although Allan departed from Fuller's example and embraced the more conspicuously erotic orientalism associated with traditional nineteenth-century Salome images, she shared Fuller's sense of choreographic authorship, going to great lengths to assert her self-control and individualism as a dancer. For this reason, she invites comparison with her former mentor. Tellingly, like Fuller, she also cited Sarah Bernhardt as a formative influence, recalling, in her autobiography, the effect of watching Bernhardt perform in San Francisco: "My ambitious little heart burned within me. She was the one woman in the world I wanted to rival, and I have not lost the feeling yet. […] I think the turning point in my career came from my first sight of that great woman."[104] Historians of the theatre may not often remember Bernhardt and Allan in the same breath, but it is significant that Allan articulated her aspirations in these terms, aligning herself very directly with the woman Wilde most sincerely hoped would play his Salome. In this way, she was also affiliating herself with Bernhardt's success, her formidable control of the stage, and her unrivalled command of her uncorseted, equivocally gendered body, thereby joining the community of female performers kinaesthetically connected by the memory of Bernhardt's presence.

In the same manner as that other pioneer of modern dance, Isadora Duncan, Allan styled her dance technique as a return to Hellenic aesthetic principles and poses, in tune with classical modes of beauty and grace. She also characterised her dance practice as an elegant realisation of the world's natural rhythms, inspired by "the poetry of motion in the running brooks and the rhythm of the tossing branches that gave [her] a desire to express something within [herself] by the grace of motion."[105] Like Fuller, Allan drew on a wealth of sources taken from history and the arts to

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[104] Maud Allan, *My Life and Dancing* (London: Everett & Co., 1908), 36.
[105] Ibid., 45.

devise her performance philosophy, incorporating organic, technological, and classical registers into her choreographies, despite her lack of formal training. She was also influenced by the teachings of François Delsarte, declaring that, "Delsarte's theories teach us that every fibre, every vigorous impulse, every muscle, and every feeling should have its existence so well defined that at any moment it can actually assert itself."[106] This comprehensive approach to physical movement as a means of self-expression enabled Allan and other dancers impressed by Delsarte's theories to approach their bodies as sites of power and creativity.

Crucially, Allan disputed the "impression in some quarters that whatever success [she] may have achieved has been obtained by a kind of floating, airy, effortless, butterfly kind of process." Here, she explicitly takes issue with the (now familiar) rhetoric that dehumanises the dancer and undermines her labour and bodily technique. As Allan points out, she "[has] worked, and still continues to work and study, quite apart from the physical and mental strain of public performances, very, very hard."[107] The conditions of professional dance, despite encouraging the kinds of infantilising critiques to which Allan objected, also allowed her to challenge contemporary attitudes towards women by emphasising the physical strength of her dancing body and her independence as a practitioner. It is perhaps for this reason that feminist critics have reclaimed Allan's *Vision of Salome* as an intervention in Salome's chequered and misogynist history.

The Vision of Salome opened at London's Palace Theatre on 6 March 1908, and Allan, initially scheduled to dance for two weeks, performed the piece for over eighteen months. It was set to Marcel Rémy's score, composed after the pair of them saw performances of Max Reinhardt's avant-garde production of Wilde's *Salomé* in 1903. Dierkes-Thrun claims that Allan's choice of Salome as a theme for her new dance "gave [her] a chance to make her mark as an avant-garde artist by following in the footsteps of Wilde, Reinhardt, and Strauss."[108] It also seems likely, however, that Allan was strategically aligning herself with Fuller and Bernhardt as well, since they had specifically claimed Salome as an icon of female individualism, albeit without a dramatic realisation in Bernhardt's case.[109] Although feminist thought has sometimes

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[106] Allan, *My Life and Dancing*, 65.
[107] Ibid., 75.
[108] Dierkes-Thrun, *Salome's Modernity*, 83.
[109] Allan knew Loïe Fuller and toured with her troupe in France in 1907. See Felix Cherniavsky, *The Salome Dancer: The Life and Times of Maud Allan* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1991), 148.

proved resistant to the concept of individualism, preferring to emphasise the idea of the collective, twentieth-century "avant-garde feminists," Lucy Delap contends, "used [the term individualism] in ways that complemented or were integral to their 'feminism'."[110] In Allan's case, the choice of Salome as a choreographic role was also an act of solidarity – integrating her into this particular imaginative community of performers – as well as a solo pursuit.

Moreover, Allan reflected on Salome's character in a manner strikingly reminiscent of Fuller's approach over a decade earlier: she envisaged her Salome as an innocent child with a divine gift for dance, a desire to please her mother, Herodias, and to obey Herod. The choreography for the *Vision* was, however, arranged in two parts, which Allan describes in her autobiography as "the Dance of Salome" and "the Vision of Salome." The latter presents a more complex and decidedly less chaste understanding of Salome's motives and expression, drawing on the qualities Wilde bestowed upon his dancer:

> She is horror stricken! Suddenly a wild desire takes possession of her. Why, ah! Why, should her mother have longed for this man's end? Salomé feels a strange longing, compelling her once more to hold in her hands this awful reward of her obedience, and slowly, very slowly, and with ecstasy mingled with dread, she seems to grasp the vision of her prize and lay it on the floor before her.[111]

Allan's colourful intermingling of horror, desire, wildness, and ecstasy explicitly reformulates the attributes pressed upon Salome in a string of nineteenth-century portraits, from Mallarmé to Huysmans and Wilde, which have, according to Mary Simonson, "come to stand for anxieties about cultural disorder, describing a desire to legitimize male control of female bodies and behaviour."[112] Indeed, Allan's contemporaries waxed lyrical about the erotic elements of the *Vision*, euphorically describing her as the most enticing of degenerates: "Swaying like a white witch with yearning arms and hands that plead, Miss Allan is such a delicious embodiment of lust that she might win forgiveness with the sins of her wonderful flesh."[113] Barely concealed beneath scant panels of jewels like Moreau's hypnotic dancer, Allan's body

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[110] Lucy Delap, *The Feminist Avant-Garde: Transatlantic Encounters of the Early Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 103.
[111] Allan, *My Life and Dancing*, 126.
[112] Simonson, *Body Knowledge*, 27.
[113] Journalist quoted in Cherniavsky, *The Salome Dancer,* 163.

trembled and swayed on stage, embracing Salome's intense and unearthly sexuality (Fig. 5).

Yet in performance, Allan's reclaiming of Salome's perceived sordidness – her anguished and violent lust – did more than simply repeat the stereotypes implicit in earlier incarnations of this figure. The mere fact of her near exposure did not by any means disqualify her as the creator and author of the dance or turn her control over to the hungry gaze of men. Rachel Shteir has explicated the polymorphous nature of the striptease – a dance form Allan certainly drew upon – throughout its long and colourful history.[114] Shteir traces the various lives of the striptease as a model of Jazz Age decadence and women's liberation, to a more politically fraught symptom of criminal subcultures, prostitution, and the commercialisation of female sexuality. Importantly, she notes its purpose as a critique of sexual desire: the striptease artist made eroticism a spectacle, yet often parodied or satirised the very conditions of performative excess she embraced.[115] The striptease also retained an ability to provoke and infuriate throughout the twentieth century, whether its detractors were Prohibition era reformers or second-wave feminists. Furthermore, as Barthes implies in his reading of the striptease artist's technique, this form of dance also allowed the performer to assert control of her body and the terms of its revelation before an enrapt audience.[116]

Briefly discussing the stage afterlives of Wilde's dancer, Shtier identifies the craze for Salome dances as an important "phase in the history of undressing," pointing out the contradictions inherent in Allan's carefully crafted self-image and the descriptions of her dance as lascivious and explicit.[117] Yet although she depended upon rather different styles of self-presentation and choreography, Allan, like Bernhardt and Fuller before her, contrived an unlikely space for the female spectator among her hushed and enthralled audience members. Many of Allan's most ardent fans during this period were young, respectable middle-class women, who responded to her *Vision* by throwing parties in her honour, to which, unsurprisingly, no men were invited. At these gatherings, some of which Allan herself attended, the women

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[114] Rachel Shteir, *Striptease: The Untold History of the Girlie Show* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).
[115] Ibid., 4-8.
[116] See discussion of Barthes' essay on "Striptease" in the Introduction.
[117] Shteir, *Striptease*, 45.
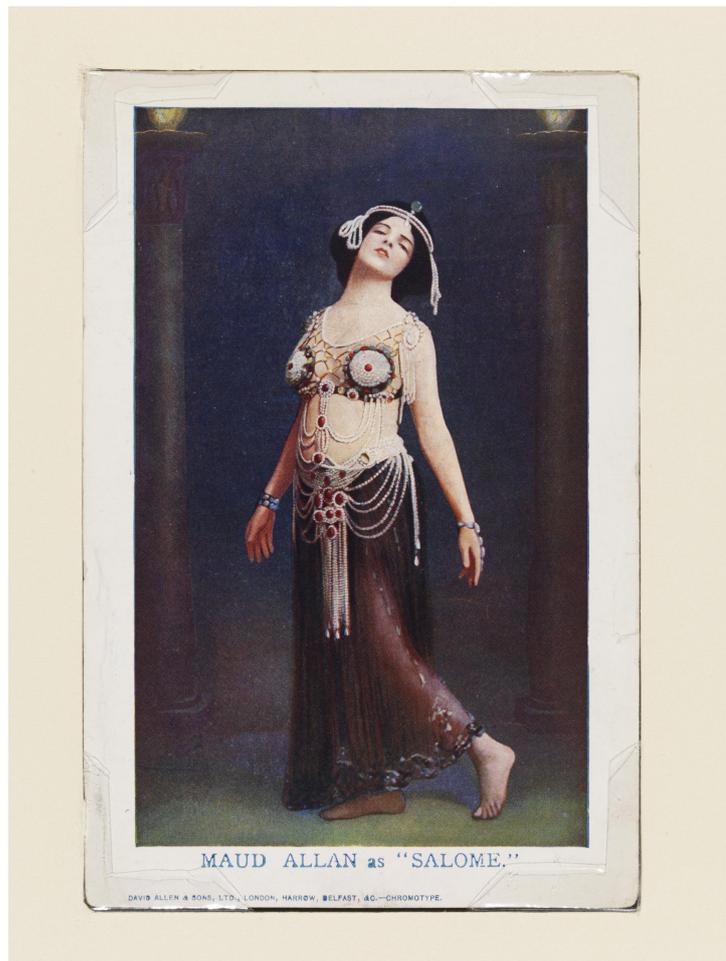
"Maud Allan as Salome." London: David Allen & Sons Ltd., 1908. The Victoria & Albert Museum. Given by the American Friends of the V&A through the generosity of Leslie and Judith Schreyer and Gabrielle Shrem Schreyer.

present dressed up as Salome, listened to music, and enthused about the power of her dance. The women's suffrage movement also quickly adopted Allan as a symbol of "rebellion, individualism, and violence."[118] As Judith Walkowitz has shown, "A younger generation of feminists were drawn to Salome's dance, because women could embrace it as their own cultural form and use it to claim possession of their own erotic gaze[,]" thereby challenging the assumption that Salome's veiled body was oriented towards the desires of men alone.[119]

Of course, Allan's swell in popularity among women was met by stern objections about the morally corrosive influence of her dances. A particularly concerned journalist at the *New York Times* chronicled a worrying "spread of Bohemianism in English society," and featured Allan as an instigator of this trend, even suggesting that that King Edward had been forced to combat Salome's insidious presence in the domestic sphere:

> From the presentation of the Salome dance in English homes, and the lionising of the performer as an honoured and gushed-over guest, to the appearance of some of these feminine enthusiasts of rank and lineage in the same role, is but a step. It is bound to come unless a halt is called. Indeed, it is insisted by popular rumour that Miss Allan has already found adept imitators among her titled friends, gossip pointing in this connection to the married daughter of a Ducal House, renowned for her extravagances and eccentricities, though no word of reproach has ever been brought against her character.[120]

The forms of "imitation" alluded to in this article loosely implicate Allan and her circle in the unnamed sexual proclivities associated with Wilde and Salome as a cultural figure. "Extravagances and eccentricities" obliquely suggest all kinds of extraordinary and unorthodox habits, without, of course, explicitly detailing the practices they hint at. The language used to describe Salome's insatiable reach into every aspect of cultural life in Britain (and elsewhere) reflects the rhetorical strategies deployed to announce, identify, and condemn homosexuality in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, exploiting the mutability of meaning and the openness of suggestion, rather than direct treatment of the thing. It is in this way that queerness could be construed as pernicious, widespread, and contagious.

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[118] Dierkes-Thrun, *Salome's Modernity*, 100.

[119] Judith Walkowitz, *Nights Out: Life in Cosmopolitan London* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2012), 65.

[120] "The Spread of Bohemianism in English Society," *New York Times*, August 16, 1908, ProQuest.

Wilde's spectre, liable to reappear throughout the early decades of the twentieth century, certainly overshadowed the rhetoric surrounding Allan's dancing, and his image was resurrected once again when Allan became embroiled in a scandalous court case that effectively placed the figure of Salome on trial.[121] In February 1918, while Allan was preparing to play the lead role in J. T. Grein's production of *Salomé*, the right-wing MP Noel Pemberton Billing implicitly accused her of participating in homosexual subcultures in his journal *The Vigilante*, in an article entitled "The Cult of the Clitoris." This elliptical paragraph not only suggested that there was an active circle of Salome enthusiasts engaged in clitoral worship, constellated around the magnetic figure of Maud Allan, but that these individuals were additionally immersed in acts of political subversion and treason:

<div align="center">The Cult of the Clitoris</div>

> To be a member of Miss Maud Allan's performances in Oscar Wilde's Salome one has to apply to a Miss Valetta, of 9, Duke Street. . . . If Scotland Yard were to seize the list of these members I have no doubt they would secure the names of several thousand of the first 47,000.[122]

The fantastically strange context of this wartime article has been thoroughly examined in Michael Kettle's *Salome's Last Veil: The Libel Case of the Century* and also in Philip Hoare's *Oscar Wilde's Last Stand*, two studies of the libel trial that ensued after Billing authorised the printing of the accusation.[123] The reference to the "47,000" alludes to an elaborate conspiracy theory advanced by Billing in an earlier article for *The Vigilante*, in which he described a German plot to spread homosexuality throughout British society and, at the same time, turn civilians into informants. The guilty parties – "forty-seven thousand English men and women" – were apparently listed in a mysterious book belonging to "a certain German Prince." In the court case that commenced when Allan and Grein sued Billing for libel, "the threat of Wilde," Jodie

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[121] Kirstin Mahoney has shown how Wilde's "ghost" continued to exert a grip on the popular imagination after his death: the *Los Angeles Times* and *New York Times* devoted articles to alleged "sightings" of the author, and Wilde's nephew Arthur Cravan (who himself disappeared mysteriously) published a posthumous interview with Wilde in the Surrealist magazine *Maintenant* in 1913. See Mahoney, *Literature and the Politics of Post-Victorian Decadence* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 6.

[122] *The Vigilante*, February 16, 1918, reprinted in Noel Pemberton Billing, ed. *Verbatim Report of the Trial of Noel Pemberton Billing M.P. On a charge of Criminal Libel Before Mr Justice Darling at the Central Criminal Court, Old Bailey* (London: Vigilante Office, 1918), 455. Quoted in Michael Kettle, *Salome's Last Veil: The Libel Case of the Century* (London: Hart-Davis, 1977), 18-19.

[123] Philip Hoare, *Oscar Wilde's Last Stand: Decadence, Conspiracy and the Most Outrageous Trial of the Century* (New York: Arcade, 1998).

Medd declares, "was supplemented and perhaps exceeded by the threat of lesbian sexual espionage."[124]

These anxieties about sexual and political sedition connect in the figure of Salome, a woman born into royalty who lived in Roman-occupied Judea, a region riven along racial and religious faultlines. Salome's dance was portrayed as an erotic offence of monstrous proportions, incestuously designed to seduce her uncle and also to embody the homoerotic dynamics of Wilde's play, but it was further open to interpretation as an act of political subterfuge, deceiving the Tetrarch into the politically dubious execution of his hostage, Iokanaan. Wartime Britain, alert to the threat of espionage, betrayal, and unpatriotic feeling, had a heightened susceptibility to such myths, which appeared to connect unorthodox bodies to unpredictable politics. Just as Allan was imagined to be part of this coterie of homosexual spies, Salome too might be perceived as an enemy of the state: the lover of a prophet-prisoner, and beguiler of Kings.

Moreover, across its many forms in literature and the visual arts, Salome's dance was grounded in the kind of uncertain language that governed representations of the female body, brought into sharp relief by the confusion surrounding the word "clitoris" in the Pemberton Billing trial. Medd argues: "It is precisely the language of the female body – the female non-productive but desiring body – that simultaneously demands and refuses interpretative attention, inciting scandal through its very resistance to representation."[125] Indeed, those who interpreted Salome's veiled dance as a striptease might have imagined that what lay beneath her final veil was the unknown site of female pleasure, or, in Garber's reading, the transvestic body, "a space of possibility structuring and confounding culture."[126] This substitution of the female sex with the phallus performs a somewhat reductive misreading of the dancer's gender at the moment of revelation, figuratively replacing the woman's body with the imagined desires and anatomy of her homosexual male creator. Yet Garber does tap into the deep ambiguities that structured Salome's plural sexual meanings, in Wilde's play and other texts, which allowed the distinctions between the deceased male author, the lesbian dancer, and the veiled muse they shared to be erased so comprehensively during the 1918 trial.

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[124] Jodie Medd, "'The Cult of the Clitoris': Anatomy of a National Scandal," *Modernism/ modernity* 9 (2002): 29.
[125] Ibid., 32.
[126] Garber, *Vested Interests*, 342.

The sense that the Pemberton Billing case was essentially reviving the history of Wilde's trials was enhanced by the presence of Lord Alfred Douglas as a witness. Disparaging his relationship with Wilde, Douglas viciously denounced the author of *Salomé* as "the greatest force for evil in Europe in the last 350 years. Not only sexual evil […] He was an agent for the devil in every possible way."[127] Contriving Wilde in such terms, Douglas emphasised the potential of his literature to breed chaos "in Europe," subtly overwriting *Salomé*'s Hiberno-French heritage and the legacies of transnational Symbolism, and re-situating the play within the larger, more prescient context of a continent at war. Furthermore, he characterised himself as an interpreter of the text's allusions and motifs, claiming that Wilde "intended it to be an exhibition of perverted sexual passion," and even arguing that the prominent image of the moon was a symbol of "unnatural vice."[128]

In this way, the trial became a stage for closely reading the text of *Salomé* against the imagined proclivities and anatomical intricacies of Maud Allan.[129] It was, Lucy Bland argues, "the British war years' most visible attack on the morality of a lone woman."[130] Allan's rumoured desires were thought to be confirmed by her knowledge of her own body: the medical expert Dr Serrell Cooke declared that only a doctor or a "pervert" could possibly understand the meaning of the word "clitoris."[131] The fact that her brother Theo had been executed for a pair of gruesome murders decades before was also used as evidence of Allan's "hereditary vice,"[132] although the other key "relative" in this case was certainly Wilde, who bound the dancer into a community of artists privy to unsanctioned practices and forms of knowledge.

Allan's attempt to prosecute Pemberton Billing for libel ultimately failed, and the trial rekindled, in the most public way, feverish concerns about the cultural legacy left by Wilde, and also the perceived proximities between literature, performance, and private lives. In authoring her own version of the Salome dance, Maud Allan had built

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[127] "The Billing Case," *Manchester Guardian*, June 3, 1918, ProQuest.
[128] Ibid.
[129] Allan had previously illustrated a German sex manual for women entitled *Illustrated Dictionary of the Woman* (1900). As Toni Bentley notes, Pemberton Billing never found out about this or he would certainly have used it at her trial to prove an "unnatural" knowledge of the clitoris. See Bentley, *Sisters of Salome*, 55.
[130] Lucy Bland, *Modern Women on Trial: Sexual Transgression in the Age of the Flapper* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 17.
[131] Medd, "Anatomy of a Scandal," 37.
[132] "Mr Pemberton Billing and Miss Maud Allan: The Opening," *Manchester Guardian*, May 30, 1918, ProQuest.

on Loïe Fuller's efforts to carve an imaginative space for the women in her audience, using modern dance as a means of disrupting conventional modes of spectatorship and female performance. She was aligned repeatedly with the suffragettes during her career, and although she distanced herself from this particular group, she was very much a part of the progressive politics and "rebellious cultural modernism of Margot Asquith and her set, who celebrated a mobile, expressive individualism[,]" despite disapproving of the more radical and violent aspects of the suffrage campaign.[133] It was when she returned to Wilde's play in 1918 that Allan was punished most severely for her long association with the figure of Salome, and her dancing body was unceremoniously critiqued as a site of sexual and political betrayal, complicit in the veiled sins of the original text.

The Cult of Salome

The women who interpreted Salome's dance in the fin-de-siècle and early twentieth century imagined the dance, taken out of its literary and painterly forms, as a vessel for individual authorship on stage, which corresponded with their desire to create a distinct role for the female choreographer. Loïe Fuller and Maud Allan took two very different approaches to the veiled body of Salome, but each nonetheless used this theme to orchestrate their own choreographies, fashioning themselves as the dance's singular creative force in their interviews and autobiographical writings. When the Ballets Russes premiered *La Tragédie de Salomé* in 1913 with Tamara Karsavina dancing in the lead role, they recalled Fuller's lavish 1907 production, even using the original score devised by Florent Schmitt.[134] That Diaghilev's company, the experimental, avant-garde face of choreographic modernism, should allude to Loïe Fuller's version of *Salomé* in the early years of its rampant European success, testifies to Fuller's lasting cultural legacy as a dance pioneer and, moreover, her ability to communicate between "high art" and the popular stage.

Salome's dance was fanatically reproduced during this period across Europe and the USA, building on the triumphs of Fuller and Allan, as well as the controversy mustered around Wilde's play. Gertrude Hoffmann, a Maud Allan imitator, enjoyed real success on the American stage, alongside Eve Tanguay, Aida Overton Walker,

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[133] Walkowitz, *Nights Out*, 64-65.
[134] "The Russian Ballet," *The Observer*, July 6, 1913, ProQuest.

and drag performers such as Eddie Cantor.[135] "Salomania," whetted by an occidental fascination for the East, also reflected modern conceptions of the dancer as "a mobile European subject," whose moving body could engage spectators in "a synecdochic, kinaesthetic experience of other cultures," even refiguring the performer as "a portable world's fair."[136] Salome's enduring popularity in the early twentieth century also reflected the continued relevance of fin-de-siècle aesthetic movements to the burgeoning projects of modernism, despite claims to the contrary in some quarters. The Pemberton Billing trial may have most conspicuously energised concerns about Wilde's phantasmic clutch on the throat of modern British culture, but elsewhere, the tenets of Decadence and Symbolism continued to preoccupy writers who responded to the 1890s as both a decaying, lethargic endpoint, and a period of radicalism and artistic freedom. Fuller and Allan's careers in dance spanned the decades bridging these two centuries, and their contributions to modern dance not only altered perceptions of the female dancer as a creative force, but also intervened in larger aesthetic debates concerning the status afforded to women and their bodies in art, and the imaginative possibilities for female spectators at the modern theatre. In particular, as my next chapter shows, Fuller's influence on subsequent versions of the Salome theme, and on the techniques of emergent media such as the cinema, can be traced through the manifestations of Salome in films that appeared throughout the 1920s and 30s, a period when female artists rediscovered the potential of this strangely powerful biblical dancer.

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[135] Glenn, *Female Spectacle*, 101-117.

[136] Michelle Clayton, "Modernism's Moving Bodies," *Modernist Cultures* 9 (2014): 30.

CHAPTER THREE
"Harmonies of light": Ciné-Dances and Women's Silent Film

In her essay "Three Encounters with Loïe Fuller" (1928), the avant-garde film director Germaine Dulac insists upon a sincere and intimate connection between Fuller's choreographic creations and the aesthetic commitments of French cinema in the 1920s. "Loïe Fuller created her first harmonies of light at the moment when the Lumière brothers gave us the cinema," declares Dulac, "Strange coincidence at the dawn of an epoch, which is and will be that of visual music; the work of Loïe Fuller aligns with our own, and that is why cinéastes here owe her a profound and ultimate homage."[1] For Dulac, and other pioneers of the silent screen, the idea of dance, and especially the forms of modern dance, underpinned what they thought of as "the grammar of cinema": a visual language predicted above all on the qualities of movement.[2] The idea of a "visual language" might, as Tom Gunning observes, "pose a rather awkward oxymoron," but there nonetheless "exists a rhetoric of vision" in film and other performance cultures of period that "plays with (rather than simply assumes the power of) sight." [3] In what follows, I show how the choreographic language developed by selected female filmmakers crystallised around Salome and her dance during this period. Developing the relationship between the figure of Salome and the self-fashioning of female dancers explored in the last chapter, this chapter will follow Salome and the women who performed her dance into the sphere of silent film, concentrating on Alla Nazimova's *Salomé: An Historical Phantasy by Oscar Wilde* (1923), often considered the first example of an art film, and Dulac's fascination with dance in her abstract short films and essays on cinema. This chapter newly brings the work of these two women into dialogue by drawing out their shared attention to the implications of new technologies and art forms for female bodies, particularly the bodies of dancers, expressed through discourses of mechanization, posing, gesture,

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[1] Germaine Dulac, "Trois Recontres avec Loïe Fuller," in *Écrits sur le cinema: 1919-1937*, ed. Prosper Hillairet (Paris: Éditions Paris Experimental, 1994), 110. Translations from this work are my own unless otherwise specified.

[2] Jean Epstein, "The Photogenic Element," trans. Tom Milne, in *Jean Epstein: Critical Essays and New Translations*, ed. Sarah Keller and Jason N. Paul (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), 301.

[3] Tom Gunning, "'We are Here and Not Here': Late Nineteenth-Century Stage Magic and the Roots of Cinema in the Appearance (and Disappearance) of the Virtual Image," in *A Companion to Early Cinema*, ed. André Gaudreault, Nicolas Dulac and Santiago Hidalgo (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 53.

and film aesthetics. Salome emerges again as a site of invention, with Wilde's play forming the basis of Nazimova's highly influential cinematic adaptation, and inspiring Dulac's early depictions of Decadent femininity, and her later, more abstract film choreographies.

As her homage to Wilde suggests, Nazimova was also influenced by the aesthetics of late nineteenth-century Symbolism and Decadence, and, like Loïe Fuller before her, she cultivated a powerful relationship between the figure of Salome and the individual artistry of women filmmakers and dancers. As a trained dancer, Nazimova considered her body to be a malleable tool, instrumental in creating aesthetic meaning and denoting a grammar of physical expression. If Dulac found Fuller's "harmonies of light" to be visual correlates for the processes of the new cinematic art, she was also impressed by Nazimova's performance techniques. After watching the Russian actor in Albert Capellani's *La Lanterne rouge* (1919), she wrote to the producer Louis Nalpas, "I saw Nazimova again, yesterday in *La Lanterne rouge*. And I am enthused. Her slightest gesture is the synthesis of an entire state of mind. She is beautiful, powerful and true, and she knows how to express her spirit without false means. She is great among the greats."[4] Rosanna Maule and Catherine Russell have suggested that a particular "'women's' modernity" emerges from the "overlapping frames of more dominant discourses of modernity such as Symbolism, Art Nouveau, […] and of course the discourse on avant-garde cinema," which collide in the work of these two filmmakers.[5] Furthermore, as Maule and Russell contend, "the cinephilia associated with women's movie going in the 1920s was highly experimental and sensory […] [involving] a kind of bodily incorporation, which may find its most emblematic moment in the swirling scarves of Loïe Fuller's serpentine dances" and also, this chapter proposes, the veils of Salome.[6]

Concentrating on the work of Nazimova and Dulac, I consider how the literary and choreographic genealogies previously discussed in relation to Salome map onto the realm of silent film. Much as they were enthralled by the imaginative possibilities afforded by dance, writers were also intrigued by, and often involved in, early filmmaking. In *Cinema and Modernism*, David Trotter shows that this was a

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[4] Letter from Germaine Dulac to Louis Nalpas, November 25, 1919. Tami Williams cites this letter in her study *Germaine Dulac: A Cinema of Sensations* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2014), 110.
[5] Rosanna Maule and Catherine Russell, "Another Cinephilia: Women's Cinema in the 1920s," *Framework* 46 (2005): 52.
[6] Ibid.

widespread and mutual fascination as literary modernism "[enquired] into the age's wilful absorption in the kinds of automatic behaviour exemplified by machinery in general, and by the new technologies of perception in particular."[7] Indeed, as Laura Marcus observes, the effects of cinema on writing of the period were both specific and diffuse, encouraging broader considerations of the "interplay between stasis and mobility" and the "mechanical [...] and the organic", shaping "new understandings of vision and identity in a moving world."[8] The new "language" of cinema – with its signs, images, and stylistic conventions – facilitated a widespread interest in hieroglyphics; in visual and pictorial systems of meaning, which dance, with its vocabulary of rhythms and bodies, articulated in a similar way.[9] The "enigmatic language" of hieroglyphics also shared a sense of indecipherability with the complex "language" of the female body, pointing to "a certain imbrication of the cinematic image and the representation of the woman," suggested by Mary Ann Doane in her discussion of female spectatorship.[10]

Alert to these interplays, recent scholarship has recognised and described the connections between early cinema and the work of dancers. McCarren, for example, perceptively asserts that the arrival of the cinema marked a moment of transition for the performing body, notably that of the dancer, at the levels of both technique and iconography. Paralleling the development of new modes of dance, the flourishing of the Seventh Art at the close of the nineteenth century "manifests overlapping currents of thinking about movement and its representation in both live performance and recording technology."[11] Moreover, Laura Marks and Giuliana Bruno, among others, have done much to revise critical approaches to film as a predominantly visual medium, since they emphasise the haptic and kinaesthetic dimensions of cinematic experience, which resonate particularly with the art of dance.[12] My focus on Dulac and Nazimova allows me to trace the interrelated ways in which dance and silent film wrought their sensory effects on the bodies of spectators in the theatre and the auditorium, often through the representation of human forms altered by

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[7] Trotter, *Cinema and Modernism*, 10.

[8] Laura Marcus, *The Tenth Muse: Writing about Cinema in the Modernist Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 3; 5.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Mary Ann Doane, *Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 19.

[11] McCarren, *Dancing Machines*, 21.

[12] Laura Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment and the Senses* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000); Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture and Film* (New York: Verso, 2002).

modernisation. Throughout her career as an abstract filmmaker, Germaine Dulac invested much in the idea of a cinema of visual rhythms, drawing on the transformational aesthetics realised in Fuller's performances. Dulac was one of the first to appreciate Fuller's contribution to the formation of the cinema, since her innovations with light and movement coincided with the work of the Lumière brothers and early efforts to hand-tint frames.[13] The comparative approach I adopt in this chapter therefore contributes new insights to an established body of criticism, bringing Dulac's compositional and cinematographic practices into dialogue with the methods of a performer like Nazimova. In this way, I highlight the intersections in their responses to Symbolist models and the emergence of a feminist consciousness in filmmaking, built around the dance of Salome.

Alla Nazimova's "Serpentine Weavings"

The specific contexts and practices of silent film determine its engagement with Salome's status as an object of aesthetic contemplation and erotic spectacle. In her discussion of Nazimova, Dierkes-Thrun claims that the 1923 silent film *Salomé* "presents Salome […] as a mixture of the modern woman, the femme fatale stereotype, and, finally, a homoerotic and aesthetic stand-in for Wilde."[14] Certainly, Nazimova's work paid tribute to Wilde and Beardsley's fin-de-siècle vision but she also engaged with the forms of movement and corporeal expression particular to silent film and to the modern choreographies that had such a powerful influence on performance practices across a range of disciplines. As an actor who built her fame on distinctive interpretations of Henrik Ibsen's dramatic heroines, and an avant-garde adaptation of Wilde's play, it is perhaps surprising that Nazimova has not been integrated more frequently into cultural studies of modernism or interdisciplinary analyses of literature and silent film. Although she was, for a period of time, the highest paid actress in Hollywood, Nazimova has slipped into relative obscurity outside specialised theatre and silent film studies.[15]

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[13] Tom Gunning, "Light, Motion, Cinema!: The Heritage of Loïe Fuller and Germaine Dulac," *Framework* 46, no. 1 (2005): 106-129.

[14] Dierkes-Thrun, *Salome's Modernity*, 142.

[15] See, for example, Jack Spears, *Hollywood: The Golden Era* (New York: Castle Books, 1971); Harlow Robinson, *Russians in Hollywood, Hollywood's Russians: Biography of an Image* (Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 2007); Thomas Arthur, "Female interpreters of Ibsen on Broadway, 1896–1947: Minnie Maddern Fiske, Alla Nazimova & Eva Le Gallienne," *Ibsen Studies* 1 (2000): 54-67; Sheilah Graham offers a history of the property Nazimova owned in Hollywood, where she hosted numerous

Early responses to Nazimova precipitated her later reinvention of the Salome figure. Arriving in New York as a Russian émigré in 1905, Nazimova carved a space for herself in an America culturally inflamed by Salomania and obsessed in a broader sense with the imagined exoticism of the Orient. Edward Said has shown that this fascination was often engendered by fantasises of "luxuriant and seemingly unbounded sexuality," which, as we have seen, also suffused images of Salome.[16] Media reports, clippings, and profiles of Nazimova have so far remained largely unexamined but they reveal a consistent preoccupation with her perceived "otherness" and exotic appeal. The *New York Times*, for instance, lingered on her physical appearance, indulging in descriptions of her face and body in a manner that reflected wider orientalist imaginings:

> Mme Nazimova is so utterly foreign that her mere presence carries with it an atmosphere of the Crimea, where she was born, on the shores of the Black Sea. She is dark, with such an intense, passionate, concentrated depth of coloring as is unknown to brunettes of the Western hemispheres. Her hair is as black as jet, and, if such a thing is possible, her eyes are even blacker than her hair. Her face and carriage are spirited: her features are clear cut. Power, rather than gentleness, ambition, rather than introspection, and above all a mastering love of conquest, are the traits most apparent in her expression.[17]

Nazimova's features are here catalogued and perversely extoled, rendering her difference to her "Western" spectators emphatic. The writer proposes intimate connections between the Russian actor's physiognomy and the geography of the Orient, recalling in her face, hair, and frame the contours of the Crimea, a space of variable frontiers and uncertain sovereignty, long contested by opposing factions. Nazimova's body, apprehended by her interviewer, here exists as the locus of a foreign territory, perhaps vulnerable (or perhaps resistant) to the imperial gaze. Moreover, those qualities regularly inscribed on visions of Salome – "power," "ambition," and a "love of conquest" – are all in evidence, thereby aligning Nazimova with the stereotypes of lustful and vengeful femininity often imposed upon images of oriental womanhood, long before she adapted Wilde's play.

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actors and celebrities and supposedly entertained her circle of lesbian friends, in *The Garden of Allah* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1970).

[16] Said, *Orientalism,* 187.

[17] "At Close Range with Alla Nazimova the Russo-English Actress," *New York Times*, November 18, 1906, ProQuest.

Such rhetorical tendencies reflect the language used to portray Salome. Repeated across popular conceptions of Nazimova, fantasies of Eastern difference – of spiritualism, primitivism, and sexual transgression – also played a fundamental role in shaping Salome's nineteenth- and early twentieth-century forms, as well as representations of dancers more widely.[18] André Gide's writing on dance is a case in point. For Gide, an intimate acquaintance of Wilde and Lord Alfred Douglas, dance was intimately connected to the Orient and his experiences in Morocco and Algeria, places that were an elemental part of his homoerotic life. In his journal, he recalls his fascination for the wild obscenities of the *Caracous*, local farces performed in cafes and brothels, and also the dances of women, possessed by the devil, who had paid to be exorcised.[19] Gide remembers their "savage dance, involving the whole body," which left the "women haggard, wild-eyed, seeking to lose consciousness of their flesh, or better to lose all feeling, […] reaching the crisis in which, their bodies escaping all control of the mind, the exorcism can operate effectively."[20] Such cultural practices also leave their traces in Salome's dance, which was closely associated with the mysterious glamour and religious ecstasy of the Orient, fetishised by Symbolist writers from Huysmans to Gide in their work. Unlike Mallarmé in his rapturous celebrations of Elena Cornalba and Loïe Fuller, Gide does not present dance as a formal analogue for writing; rather, he concentrates on physical details: the "wet hair fall[ing] over their shoulders" and the body "knotted with hysteria."[21] Although Gide is entranced by the spectacle of the dance, his impressions exoticise the alien bodies of the dancers, portraying their choreographies as primitive rituals – pagan and "savage" —, a collective display of feminine excess tellingly dismissed as a "gathering of witches."[22]

Gide's language here anticipates Yeats's bewildered reflection on the "savage gods" of the fin-de-siècle theatre, instituting a similar relationship between choreographed movement and primitivism that also relates to modern forms of performance and sexuality. At the height of her popularity, Nazimova was figured in similar terms as alluring but also potentially dangerous: a *femme fatale* of the stage and,

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[18] See Peter Wollen, "Fashion/ Orientalism/ The Body," *New Formations* 1 (1987): 5-33; Gurminder Kaur Bhogal, *Details of Consequence: Ornament, Music and Art in Paris* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[19] André Gide, *The Journals of André Gide,* trans. Justin O'Brien, vol. 1, *1889-1913* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1948), 57-68.

[20] Ibid., 68.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid.

later, of the silent screen. As a *New York Tribune* article proclaimed, "the almost inevitable word […] is 'exotic.' [Nazimova] is a strange plant, a night blooming marvel, that may have strange poisons in its flowers or leaves."[23] This strategy of establishing difference through romantic metaphor resonates with the way Salome was imagined in Wilde's play and the other texts that stressed her decadent orientalism and associated rapacious instincts. The writer Solita Solano, a close friend of Djuna Barnes, found Nazimova "admirably fitted physically to portray an entire gallery of predatory females," of which Salome was certainly one of the more notable examples.[24] In her summary of Nazimova's stage roles, Solano suggested that the actor's performances were characterised by a perverse "intensity; their eyes burned with unquenchable desires; their mouths were blood red."[25] Such accounts of Nazimova's appearance are embedded in efforts to dehumanise and differentiate, figuring the actress as vampiric – hungry perhaps for the blood of men – and unnatural in her physical transformations. Like Salome, Nazimova was of Jewish heritage, and many of these sources repeated familiar anti-Semitic stereotypes in their descriptions of the actor, alluding to innate connections between Nazimova's "dark" countenance and the threatening feminine allure she was believed to project. In this way, Nazimova fell victim to the competing racialised myths often imposed upon Jewish bodies, which were portrayed, in Maren Tova Linett's words, as "exotic or romantic or eerily powerful; […] weighted with pathos and laden with history."[26]

Salome's voluptuous oriental womanhood reflected fantasies about the figure of the sensuous "Jewess" and concomitant anxieties about the feminisation of modern men, notably articulated in Otto Weininger's virulently anti-Semitic critique of the effeminate male Jew in his *Sex and Character* (1903).[27] The real and imagined figure of the Jew was often seen to embody the cultures of modernity – mobility, rootlessness, the metropolis – but was at the same time an excluded or marginalised

[23] "Art and Alla Nazimova: Russian Actress Sought out as Model and Inspiration," *New York Tribune*, December 17, 1911, ProQuest.
[24] Solita Solano, "Ibsen Reforms a Vampire," *New York Tribune*, May 19, 1918, ProQuest.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Maren Tova Linett, *Modernism, Feminism and Jewishness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 2.
[27] See Ritchie Robertson, "Historicizing Weininger: The Nineteenth-Century German Image of the Feminized Jew," in *Modernity, Culture and 'The Jew'*, ed. Bryan Cheyette and Laura Marcus (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), 23-39. Robertson identifies Heine's Herodias in *Atta Troll* as a transformation of the feminine Jewish stereotype into the *femme fatale* (26). See also Jonathan Freedman, "Transformations of a Jewish Princess: Salome and the Remaking of the Jewish Female Body from Sarah Bernhardt to Betty Boop," *Philological Quarterly* 92 (2013): 89-114.

subject.[28] Throughout her career, Nazimova was associated through her roles with either the sensationalism of the stage vamp or Ibsen's New Women, and, as a lesbian Russian Jew, she was personally vulnerable to these conflicted attitudes. Reflecting the erotic mystery of Salome's veiled form, Nazimova's body was interpreted by some of her spectators as a site of plural signification in performance, working through "the veil of a barbarous tongue" by "play of feature and of body."[29] The following review of *Hedda Gabler,* for instance, offers a revealing interpretation of Nazimova's moving body:

> It was in her face that the spectator read the creeping and calculated cruelties of her Hedda Gabler, princess of the Orient. In her body he saw the perverse and morbid languors with which she chose to clothe her. Serpentine were her coilings about Lövborg's spirit, and serpentine were equally her weavings and her hisses about Brack. Her Hedda was conceived out of her own imagination and nowhere else. All the allurements of her personality could not beguile Ibsen's play to it; but granted that conception, it was by feature, gesture and body that she most suggested and defined it. In her body again was Nora's grace, and in her face, above all, Nora's fear and illumination.[30]

Ibsen's female protagonists share Salome's sexuality and fervent mobility, as Jane Marcus recognises in her assessment of Wilde's heroine as a "biblical Hedda Gabler."[31] In the passage above, Nazimova's performance is figured as a serpentine coiling of body and speech, clearly recalling the language Wilde used to describe his imagined Salome, Sarah Bernhardt, and also the serpentine movements of Loïe Fuller. Indeed, the reviewer's focus on the way Nazimova "suggests" meaning through her body echoes Mallarmé's description of Fuller's dancing form as an instrument of essential expression unhampered by language. Moreover, the interweaving of oriental tropes and serpentine movement suggests that Nazimova's choreographic motions circumscribe and reveal her "perverse and morbid" femininity, thereby associating her with the Decadent Cruel Woman, a close sister of the *femme fatale* figure and of Salome particularly.[32]

However, as Gaylyn Studlar has shown, "the spectacle of orientalised identities [was] associated with ambiguous feminine power" and dancers themselves

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[28] Bryan Cheyette and Laura Marcus, "Introduction," in *Modernity, Culture and 'the Jew'*, 3.
[29] "The Transformation of Nazimova," *Current Literature* XLIII, December 1907, ProQuest.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Marcus, "The Jewish Princess was a New Woman," 105.
[32] Alice Condé, "Incorporeal Punishment: Writing Masochism and the Cruel Woman in English Decadence, 1860-1900," (PhD Diss., Goldsmiths, University of London, 2014). Condé considers Salome specifically as a Cruel Woman rather than a *femme fatale* in her chapter on Wilde (113-153).

drew connections between modern conceptions of womanhood and rhythmic sensuality. [33] For Studlar, Salome embodies precisely this complex female authority, and Nazimova too was deeply immersed in the interplays between orientalism, female agency, and choreographed motion.[34] The term "serpentine," employed to describe Nazimova's "coiling" gestures, took on new resonances during the first decades of the twentieth century as dancers and actors prioritised forms of movement predicated, according to Hillel Schwartz, on "the force of gravity, fluid movement flowing out of the body centre, freedom of invention and natural transitions through many fully expressive positions."[35] In his probing essay "Torque: The New Kinaesthetic of the Twentieth Century," Schwartz claims that modern dancers, influenced by an increasingly mechanized modern world and also more organic kinds of generative movement, became fixated with the idea of "torsion," developing in their choreographies "a kinaesthetic in which, above all, movement transforms."[36] Echoing the qualities of the serpentine line as it has been understood in aesthetic philosophy (in the writing of Burke, for instance), torsion denotes a form of spiralling movement that, in Schwartz's view, defined a new kinaesthetic based on fluid dynamism.[37] This emphasis on torsion – on sinuous and serpentine motion in dance and silent film performance – made the human body the site of spiritual meaning, turning "physical movement" into "a form of worship," with the "radiant centre" of the dancer connecting the earthly to the divine.[38] This was particularly evident, for example, in Isadora Duncan's celebration of the "solar plexus."[39]

Schwartz's observations are pertinent to my case studies as Nazimova was acutely attuned to the development of this corporeal economy in dance and performance. Influenced by Stanislavsky's pedagogy in particular, Nazimova believed that the gestures and movements of the body could be more deeply connected to inner meaning than spoken language, which positions her in illuminating proximity to broader conversations about the bodies of female dancers developed in the work of Mallarmé, Edward Gordon Craig, and other theorists who sought to make dance

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[33] Gaylyn Studlar, "'Out-Salomeing Salome': Dance, the New Woman, and Fan Magazine Orientalism," *Michigan Quarterly Review* 34 (1995): 491.
[34] Ibid., 491.
[35] Hillel Schwartz, "Torque: The New Kinaesthetic of the Twentieth Century," in *Incorporations*, ed. Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter (New York: Zone, 1992), 73.
[36] Ibid., 75; 77.
[37] "torsion, n.". OED Online. June 2017. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/203660?redirectedFrom=torsion
[38] Schwartz, "Torque," 75-77.
[39] Ibid.

a component of poetry and theatre. While her biographer Gavin Lambert points out that "almost every critic evoked the serpent or the cobra to describe Nazimova," it seems that these metaphors were not merely aesthetic judgements imposed upon her body, but qualities that Nazimova herself cultivated onstage.[40] In a profile for American *Vogue*, Nazimova described her process for preparing the role of Hedda Gabler, highlighting the spiralling motions of her body:

> Hedda seems to me a snake-like woman, and when she appears for the first time, between the curtains, I try to give the impression of a snake, slowly uncoiling, slowly raising, then advancing her head. In my opinion she was a decadent, an unconscious poser.[41]

Anticipating the language used by her reviewers, Nazimova describes her movements in terms of slow, serpentine unwinding, transcribing Hedda's inscrutable and elusive personality through a performance of corporeal twists and turns. As the examples of Fuller and Allan infer, this serpentine rhetoric corresponded to early feminist modes of performance, evading fixed perceptions and stable categories of womanhood. The apparent torsion of Nazimova's body reflects the wider investment in this type of motion demonstrated by modern dancers, and also reflects the qualities attributed to cinematographic motion, suggested here by Nazimova's description of "uncoiling" movement, which resonates with critical approaches to the visual languages of film and dance.

As Bergson noted in relation to his concept of "aesthetic feeling," when the spectator observes the movements of the dancing woman on stage, or the body of the actor on screen, he or she not only perceives but also *feels* the dance unfold. Indeed, taking Mallarmé's work as a key example, Christophe Wall-Romana has proposed strong connections between the sensory effects of dance and the cinema's emergence as "a dispenser of automorphic images that began informing the very processes of our visual imaginings."[42] Returning to this suggestive term "uncoiling," Wall-Romana connects the kinaesthetics of modern dance to Mallarmé's writing, claiming that the body of the dancer prompted in Mallarmé "a sensorial uncoiling experienced as both inner body feeling and outer visual movement," shaping his

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[40] Schwartz, "Torque," 164.
[41] Alla Nazimova in Elise Lathrop, "Profile: Alla Nazimova," *Vogue* 28, 1906, ProQuest.
[42] Christophe Wall-Romana, *Cinepoetry: Imaginary Cinemas in French Poetry* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 23.

perception of the links between choreography and Symbolist poetics, as well as the development of cinematographic motion.[43] Certainly, as performers like Fuller and Nazimova demonstrated, the interconnected kinaesthetics of dance and silent film shaped emergent literary forms and modes of perception, instituting a new kind of sensory communion between spectators and these twin arts of movement, as well as the types of spectatorship they invited. Nazimova's serpentine "uncoiling," like Fuller's serpentine dance, engaged with this new grammar of movement, which bridged the boundaries between different arts forms.

Furthermore, Nazimova's description of Hedda as a "decadent […] poser" reveals where her artistic interests lie, and her subsequent account of Ibsen's protagonist "[contemplating] a single flower with a look of rapt ecstasy" recalls the visual emphases of Decadent and Symbolist poetics, stressing the rapturous effects of aesthetic contemplation.[44] Although Nazimova claimed elsewhere that she did "not know what pose really means," her use of the term in this passage is conscious and deliberate, and she clearly invested much in the physical vocabulary of the body in performance. [45] In this way, she was part of a broader discussion concerning the aesthetic and somatic value of posing, stimulated, no doubt, by the popularity of Delsartism among actors, dancers, and women's health movements in the US. This school looked to the classics for its models, promoting recitation and solo posing based on mythic imagery, both for performance and personal development in terms of health and psychology. Preston has shown how "Delsartism developed mythic posing into a central modernist kinesthetic: a philosophy and technique of movement emphasising a tension between stasis and motion, poses of classical beauty, framed cinematic compositions, and speeding bodies."[46] In this sense, Nazimova's "posing" was immersed in the technological cultures of modernity, encapsulated by both the rapid movements and the photographic stillness of film, and also a sense of nostalgia for classical forms that might be newly imagined in modernist performance. Indeed, as Jones has pointed out, although many accounts of modernism focus on its

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[43] Christophe Wall-Romana, "Mallarmé's Cinepoetics: The Poem Uncoiled by the Cinématographe, 1893-98," *PMLA* 120 (2005): 136.
[44] Lathrop, *Vogue*, ProQuest.
[45] "At Close Range with Alla Nazimova: Absorbs her parts," *New York Times* April 24, 1910, ProQuest.
[46] Preston, *Modernism's Mythic Pose*, 5-6.

representations of beleaguered subjects, it was also intensely preoccupied with harmony, rhythm, and the wholeness of the body.[47]

The popularity of Delsartism among middle- and upper-class women also reflected, Preston argues, a desire for "self-cultivation," which was imbued with political and ideological forces shaping early efforts to grant women more freedom in public and domestic life.[48] This widespread interest in the liberating effects of physical activity, posing, and performance among some women might further, in part, explain the extraordinary popularity of Salome dancers, both in Europe and America, in the early twentieth century. Embodying a visceral feminine wildness and astuteness in political exchange, Salome offered the radical promise of female self-realisation through the art of dance, which was an important component of new body techniques. Dance, posing, and gesture offered women a different language that might subvert patriarchal meaning: "Striking a statue pose and performing a desired identity," Preston suggests, "would gradually achieve that self; 'personality' was a malleable project rather than a static identity."[49] It is this kind of malleability and elusiveness that Nazimova cultivated. Her "serpentine weavings" constituted attempts to navigate the familiar judgements pronounced upon the bodies of female actors, as she developed a powerful syntax of physical expression that emphasised her dynamism and strength on stage but also her ultimately unfixable personality.

It is no surprise, therefore, that Nazimova was eventually drawn to the dance of Salome. Nazimova believed that choreography was intimately connected to other types of performance, and she spoke about her own background in dance as an important part of her professional training. In a 1910 interview, she claimed that ballet was the best means of achieving precision in bodily expression, declaring, "there is nothing which puts the body into such perfect control as dancing. Every muscle is taught to respond to every command of the brain."[50] For Nazimova, the division between matter and the intellect was not a stable one; she continues, "Instinctively the body gets to harmonize with one's thoughts, and quite unconsciously a sad thought makes me assume a gesture of despair [.] […] What little grace I have I imagine is due to my ballet training."[51] Her statement on the language of gesture

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[47] Susan Jones, "Early-Twentieth-Century Physical Health, Modernism, and the Novel" (paper, *Modernism, Medicine and the Embodied Mind* conference, University of Bristol, July 16, 2016).
[48] Preston, *Modernism's Mythic Pose*, 69.
[49] Ibid., 12.
[50] "At Close Range with Alla Nazimova: Absorbs her parts," ProQuest.
[51] Ibid.

highlights the uncertain agencies underpinning Nazimova's dancing body, resisting the Cartesian hierarchy of mind and flesh. Whilst dance training, for Nazimova, ensured the body's total and immediate harmony with the intellect, it also created an equivalence between gesture and thought that resulted in an almost physical intelligence: a language of the body. In this way, Nazimova's techniques and understanding of her own body were aligned with the new kinaesthetic that, in Schwartz's words, "insists upon rhythm, wholeness, fullness, fluidity and a durable connection between the bodiliness of the inner core and the outer expressions of the physical self."[52]

The strong connections Nazimova built between posing, choreographed movement, and self-fashioning were informed by wider choreographic practices that bore a particular relevance to women's body cultures in the early twentieth century. Moreover, a fascination with particular forms of movement, derived from the serpentine line and the spiralling motion of torsion, emphasised the continuities between technological rhythms, revitalised by silent film, and the powerfully liberated bodies of modern dancers. This reflected a growing appreciation of dance, and the language of the body more generally, as a critical aspect of performance. Reviews of Nazimova in a 1907 production of *A Doll's House* celebrated her expert rendering of Nora's tarantella, and lamented, "The inability to trip the light fantastic toe has likewise proven of inestimable trouble to those actresses who, although they could act with their minds, faces, voices, and hearts, could not act with their feet."[53] In a suggestive juxtaposition, the same writer goes on to invoke another dance that had caught the attention of American audiences: the dance of Salome, performed by Julia Marlowe, in a production of Hermann Sudermann's *John the Baptist,* which is described as incomparable and "tumultuous."[54] This enticing pairing implies that, as in her many other reviews and profiles, Nazimova's singular stage presence was defined in terms of her corporeal techniques; furthermore, it confirms that in early twentieth-century New York, the figure of Salome was still a vehicle for startling inventiveness among choreographers and dancers.

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[52] Schwartz, "Torque," 104.
[53] "Dancing Wins Actresses Applause," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 7, 1907, ProQuest. Jane Marcus compares Nora's tarantella to Salome's dance in "The Jewish Princess was a New Woman," 105.
[54] Ibid.

Silent Treatment: Salome's Dance on Screen

Nazimova did not merely perform the lead role in the 1923 silent film version of *Salomé*, she also largely directed the film, despite the credit being given to her husband Charles Bryant. In this way, Nazimova's *Salomé* engaged in the dynamic tensions between the artistry of the woman on (and off) screen – her real and imagined authority – and her parallel position in the spectacle produced by the movements of the camera. In her landmark work of feminist film theory, *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema*, Teresa de Lauretis declares, "The cinematic apparatus […] was and is fully compromised in the ideology of vision and sexual difference founded on woman as image, spectacle, object and locus of sexuality."[55] For de Lauretis, recognising this construction of female subjectivity in film (and narrative more broadly) allows feminist critics to rethink the possibilities of critical language: "[to] displace the terms of the metaphors" and imagine "another measure of desire."[56] Situated in the "void of meaning […] a place not represented," the woman in cinema and the woman watching her in the audience might, in this way, newly fashion "the conditions of visibility for a different social subject."[57] Stimulated by de Lauretis's imagining of this particular cinematic process – and of a different form of desire – the silent film scholar Sandy Flitterman-Lewis suggests that what we might call the body of "feminist cinema" communicates "a different desire, desire in difference," opening up the prospect of a mobilised, rather than an erased, female spectator, as well as another kind of female subject on screen.[58]

Of course, as many theorists have argued, it is difficult to conceive of a liberated female subject within a male-oriented model of filmic representation.[59] Flitterman-Lewis observes that "defining the 'I' who speaks cinematically – as a woman – is a deceptive and difficult task," and these complexities are energised by the example of Nazimova, whose work exists within both the patriarchal structures

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[55] Teresa de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), 208.
[56] Ibid., 3; 68.
[57] Ibid., 35; 68.
[58] Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, *To Desire Differently: Feminism and the French Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 2.
[59] See in particular Laura Mulvey "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in *Film Theory and Criticism*, ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 837-848. For Flitterman-Lewis, the "enunciative model of authorship" – derived from the work of Raymond Bellour – encounters difficulties when applied to women filmmakers, because it presupposes the domination of a masculine logic, reproduced even in films made by and for women; *To Desire Differently*, 19.

of filmmaking and the arguably misogynist history of Salome as a subject for adaptation.[60] Nevertheless, like Dulac and other female directors, Nazimova found creative ways to undercut these structures, and her work opens up opportunities to "[recast] the very terms and relations of sexuality, vision, authorship, and text" through the figure of Salome and the modes of dance.[61] Considering Dulac's filmmaking in terms of *auteur*-oriented approaches to cinema, Maule has suggested that while Dulac does not explicitly theorise a feminist model of cinematic authorship, her work implicitly offers "a viable alternative to the patriarchal affiliation of *auteurism* with male-informed artistic practices and cultural contexts."[62] Moreover, although much feminist film scholarship has historically been preoccupied with the concept of the male gaze, dance, and Salome's dance in particular, encourage a discussion of other sensory models engaged by filmic representation, such as kinaesthesia, further destabilising the controlling look of the voyeur.

Nazimova's own particular encounters with the figure of Salome align with these concerns surrounding the construction of the female subject in suggestive ways. In the lost silent film *Revelation* (1918), Nazimova played the part of a cabaret singer and prostitute who, in the course of the work, is painted in a variety of classical and orientalist poses: as Sappho, Cleopatra, and, of course, Salome.[63] In a familiar doubling of the roles of performer and prostitute, this film explicitly frames Nazimova's body as a site of masculine contemplation and exchange, consigning her to the role of painterly muse, static before the artist at work. However, Nazimova's subsequent venture into directing on *Salomé*, and the particular aesthetic choices she makes in this work, place her in a different position entirely. Her decision to star in this film shows her engaging in a fascinating act of self-fashioning, built around the complex legacy of Salome, Wilde, and fin-de-siècle Symbolism. The choice of Wilde's play as a subject for adaptation, according to Patricia White, further allowed Nazimova to "[affiliate] herself with Oscar Wilde – with his *author*ity as with his notoriety."[64] It is possible to present Nazimova's authorial position in this project in both abstract and material terms: her extraordinary earnings as an actor enabled her

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[60] Flitterman-Lewis, *To Desire Differently*, 20.
[61] Ibid., 20.
[62] Rosanna Maule, "The Importance of Being a Film Author: Germaine Dulac and Female Authorship," *Senses of Cinema* 23 (2002), http://sensesofcinema.com/2002/feature-articles/dulac/.
[63] Lambert, *Nazimova: A Biography*, 190.
[64] Patricia White, "Nazimova's Veils: 'Salome' at the Intersection of Film Histories," in *A Feminist Reader in Early Cinema*, ed. Dianne Negra and Jennifer Bean (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 61.

to found her own company, Nazimova Productions, which funded the production of *Salomé*.[65] Although Bryant appears as director in the credits, it has been shown that Nazimova pioneered the venture from its inception, and that this was "a twentieth-century, decadent, American, cinematic, woman-made Salome."[66]

Nazimova was obliquely connected to Wilde through her long friendship with his American agent, Elisabeth Marbury, a central figure in the transatlantic theatrical and literary networks of New York who also likely negotiated Nazimova's transition to the Frohman company earlier in her career.[67] Notably, Charles Frohman believed that American viewers "have not felt the corroding touch of decadence. There is no real taste among us for the erotic and the decadent."[68] Nazimova's enthusiasm for European drama, from Ibsen and Strindberg to Wilde, promised to test the professed indifference of US audiences to late nineteenth-century ideas and aesthetics. Wilde's *Salomé* offered the actress another opportunity to take on a female role that challenged puritanical attitudes towards sexuality, a feat she had already achieved with her "serpentine" performances as Hedda Gabler. *Salomé* is remarkable in its status as an early cinematic project that is produced and directed by its female star. Furthermore, its radical approach to the representation of gendered bodies and non-normative forms of desire repeat the controversial achievements of Wilde's fin-de-siècle play.

Stylistically, Nazimova's *Salomé* recalls the stage of the theatre, complete with a proscenium arch, which perhaps aligns her film with earlier avant-garde versions of Wilde's *Salomé* such as Reinhardt's famous 1903 production in Berlin.[69] Kristin Thompson notes that in early cinema "the camera usually remained at a distance from the action, framing it in a way that suggested a stage seen by a spectator in a theatre seat,"[70] yet Nazimova plays with these conventions throughout, making, for instance, innovative use of close-up technique in several shots of Salome's eyes that frame her powerful gaze against a menacing black screen, reproducing Wilde's textual emphasis on unnatural gazes. Aesthetically, the film combines sumptuous oriental costumes and effects – peacock feathers, pearls, bejeweled breastplates – with Jazz Age imagery and high camp. In her analysis of Nazimova's *Salomé*, White uses the metaphor of the

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[65] Lambert, *Nazimova: A Biography*, 190.
[66] White, "Nazimova's Veils," 61.
[67] Lambert, *Nazimova: A Biography*, 154-155.
[68] Charles Frohman, quoted in Ibid., 152.
[69] For a history of this production, see Tydeman and Price, *Wilde: Salome*, 35-40.
[70] Kristin Thompson, "Classical Narrative Space and the Spectator's Attention," in David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (London: Routledge, 1988), 310.

veil, with its "specifically feminine and orientalist connotations," to read the film's "homosexual secret" as a subtext veiled by the "public sexualization of the female body."[71] Her reading is energised by the historical rumour that Nazimova (who, like Fuller, had lesbian relationships) employed an entirely bi- and homosexual cast for *Salomé*, and also by the film's luxuriant and unbounded homoeroticism, inspired in large part by Beardsley's illustrations.[72]

Strategically suggesting an association between Wilde, Beardsley and her work as a filmmaker also allowed Nazimova to subtly reclaim the orientalist grounds on which her own body had long been critiqued, using Wilde's dancer as a vessel for her own authorial ambitions as both actor and director. In this sense, she can be firmly placed in the often-overlooked tradition of women dancers, performers, and artists who employed the figure of Salome in the service of their own careers. Moreover, Nazimova's alleged lover Natacha Rambova, the wife of silent film star Rudolph Valentino, was responsible for the film's elaborate art nouveau design. Their collaboration, thought to combine film aesthetics with private erotics, underwrote the complex mechanisms of desire in *Salomé*, which frame and compromise the various bodies on display.

A close interpretive analysis of *Salomé* reveals much about the film's engagement with the kinds of sexual and bodily anxieties that permeated Wilde and Beardsley's vision, as well as its creative debts to modern dance and performance practices. Throughout the film, the actors make specific use of pose and gesture to create an almost sculptural grammar of performance. As such, their bodies, presented as deliberately stylized objects, embrace the prospect of their own aesthetic contemplation and function in the kind of imagistic terms that Marcus has discussed in the context of cinematic hieroglyphics: "Gesture in the silent film and the appearance of characters as, in [Ricciotto] Canudo's words, 'light humanized into dramatic symbols,' were also versions of the cinematic alphabet."[73] The framing of the relationship between the Page of Herodias and the Syrian Captain offers a key example. Initially, the two men are shot facing in opposite directions: the Syrian Captain's bolder physical presence is heightened by his crossed arms; the Page is in a

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[71] White, "Nazimova's Veils," 67.
[72] Kenneth Anger, *Hollywood Babylon* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1981), 163.
[73] Marcus, *The Tenth Muse*, 9; Ricciotto Canudo, "Reflections on the Seventh Art [1923]," trans. Claudia Gorbman in Richard Abel, *French Film Theory and Criticism*, vol. I, *1907-1939* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 297.

more effeminate repose, his arms lightly splayed and his leg crooked in the manner of a dancer. The actors hold their poses as the camera lingers on their bodies, suggesting that their detachment, rendered emphatic in their stances, is fixed and unmoving. Yet a subsequent medium-shot invites the audience to take a closer look and here, the distance between the Page and the Captain has been discernibly reduced. The heightened proximity between the men implies that the camera's movement has unveiled a conflicted desire that strains towards both intimacy and estrangement, despite the static poses of the performers (Fig. 6). Agamben's observation that the invention of film disrupted "the mythical fixity of the image" resonates with these kinds of subtle shifts between discrete poses and frames in this film. The bodies of the players in *Salomé*, mediated by the camera, communicate through a language of poses in which the transformative capacities of movement dominate, charging static things with a vital potential.[74]

The homoerotic dynamic between the Captain and the Page is made more explicit in later shots where they are seen facing the same direction: their bodies touch but this contact is mediated by deliberate poses that again suggest a desire that cannot be directly confronted. Particular significance is granted to these moments of carefully measured contact, creating a strained relationship between the two men that hinges on tactile meaning. In this way, the kinesis of the cinematic medium plays with the ambiguities of sensory engagement, probing into the inconsistencies of sight and appealing to other senses through an emphasis on bare skin, set against the coldness of jewels, and a heightened attention to touch. As *Salomé* demonstrates, the growing sophistication of silent film composition unsettled the boundaries between sight and the other senses, particularly in its attention to the rhythms of mechanical movement, aligning it with the kinaesthetics of dance.

Salomé's complex compositional and gestural vocabularies echo broader developments in silent film and its sensory modalities. As Jonathan Crary observes in *Suspensions of Perception*, by the turn of the century, "the very possibility and value of a sustained looking, of a 'fixed' vision, became inseparable from the effects of dynamic, kinetic, and rhythmic modalities of experience and form."[75] These apparent shifts and fluctuations in sensory perception and aesthetics aligned new technologies like the cinema with developments in dance, a connection made by commentators at the time.

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[74] Agamben, "Notes on Gesture," 139.
[75] Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 282.

The Page of Herodias and the Syrian Captain. *Salomé*. 1923.

"The rhythm of the plastic line has a new master," declared Louis Delluc in 1919; "Charlie Chaplin is a choreographer equal to Fokin, Nijinsky, Massine, and – do understand me – Loïe Fuller."[76] Considering Delluc's comment, Rancière suggests that Fuller proposed a critical "alliance between the veil, an ancient accessory of dance reinvented, and electric projection technology."[77] For Rancière, "Cinema is not the art of the movie camera – it is the art of forms in movement, the art of movement written in black-and-white forms on a surface."[78] Much as Fuller's serpentine dance was deemed an art of corporeal writing, anticipating the torsion favoured by modern dancers, the movements of the silent film actor colluded with the cinematic apparatus to create new, related aesthetic forms.

The creative symmetries between dance and cinema were further demonstrated by Jean Cocteau's collaboration with the Ballets Russes on *Parade* (1917) and silent films such as Fernand Léger's *Ballet Mécanique* (1924) and Man Ray's rhythmic cinépoème *Emak Bakia* (1926). If the movements of dancers had physiological effects on their spectators – Mallarmé found himself enthralled, dizzy and intoxicated –, then the spectacle of the cinema was also more than mere optics.[79] The haptic impulses concentrated around the language of posing and touch in *Salomé* appeal to what Vivian Sobchack has called the "carnal foundations of cinematic intelligibility."[80] Thinking about the physiological conditions of spectatorship, as well as visual effects, underlines the inventive and challenging qualities of Nazimova's directorial vision: the resistant, slowly formulated exchange between the Page and the Syrian Captain is able to get under the spectator's skin, proposing a sensory relationship between this unsanctioned touch and the responsive bodies in the audience.

It was in this way that Nazimova's treatment of the Salome theme suggested a framework for desire and spectatorship that diverged from the patriarchal and heterosexual expectations perhaps more resolutely encoded in earlier incarnations of Salome. Aligned instead with Wilde's textual erotics, the interplay between Salome

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[76] Louis Delluc, "Une idylle aux champs," *Paris-Midi,* 17 December, 1919 rep. in *Écrits cinématographiques II: Le Cinéma au quotidien* (Paris: Cahiers du Cinéma, 1990) 139; 151.
[77] Rancière, *Aisthesis*, 195.
[78] Ibid., 193.
[79] Mallarmé, "Another Study of Dance," 135.
[80] Vivian Sobchack, "What my Fingers Knew: The Cinesthetic Subject, or Vision in the Flesh," *Senses of Cinema* 5 (April 2000), http://sensesofcinema.com/2000/conference-special-effects-special-affects/fingers/. See also Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004).

and Iokanaan is similarly conceived around a dynamic tension between lust and disgust, performed through an elaborate sequence of poses. After Iokanaan emerges from his cell and is approached by Salome, the two engage in a slowly unfolding choreography of ambivalent seduction. Iokanaan uses his arms to reach up towards a higher authority and to ward off his persistent admirer, but his continued evasion concludes in an erotic grasp of Salome's shoulders, pushing her torso backwards yet also leaning his own partially naked body towards her hips. Here and elsewhere, the deferral of tactile intimacy serves to heighten the effect of physical contact when it does occur, appealing again to the audience's kinaesthetic sensitivity. In these scenes, Nazimova's body is her pliable, articulate instrument; as the film critic C. A. Lejeune declared, "It was her body that was her language, and a body trained and persuaded to the limits of the camera."[81] Yet scholars have not always recognised this film's engagement with a kinaesthetic in which movement and rhythm transform, concentrating instead on its optical dynamics. In her reading of the mechanisms of desire in *Salomé*, for example, Dierkes-Thrun suggests, "the cinematic gaze at Salomé is virtual, mediated, distanced, and safe, enabling unrestrained voyeurism."[82] Such an interpretation flattens the phenomenological complexities of this film's relationship with the spectator, which hinges on the prospect of slowly forged contact between initially separated bodies, enabled by the movement vocabulary of both the actors and the camera.

In this vein, Sobchack has shown that viewers in the film auditorium can undergo "a phenomenological experience structured on ambivalence and diffusion, on an interest and investment in being *both* 'here' *and* 'there,' in being able *both* to sense *and* to be sensible, *both* the subject *and* the object of tactile desire."[83] Although some of *Salomé*'s stylistic conventions seem to maintain a stable separation between audience and diegesis, its emphasis on the movement of bodies between strictly differentiated spaces – from isolation to intimacy – suggests that it might otherwise refigure subjective positions. The tense choreography that unfolds between Salome and Iokanaan anticipates Salome's climactic dance scene, which contributes further to the sense that conventional modes of spectatorship have been disrupted. As Studlar has demonstrated, "the movie industry showed an unbridled enthusiasm for the visual styles of dance," not merely because it reflected film's critical relationship

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[81] C.A. Lejeune, *Cinema* (London: Alexander Maclehose, 1931), 81.
[82] Dierkes-Thrun, *Salome's Modernity*, 155.
[83] Sobchack, "What my Fingers Knew."

with the art of movement, but also because it harnessed the attention of female spectators.[84] Nazimova's interpretation of the dance of the seven veils draws specifically on the tropes and techniques of modern dance, thereby aligning her Salome with dancers such as Fuller and Maud Allan, who imaginatively constructed a space for the women in their audiences, as shown in the previous chapter.

In the dance scene, Nazimova begins by emerging from a chrysalis of radiant material, with her veils held by a row of retreating soldiers. She then cavorts playfully across the stage in a tightly fitted costume that emphasises her slight, androgynous figure. The choreography for her movements appears spontaneous, lacking any clear pattern or rhythm. This is not an erotic striptease; there are no swaying gyrations or sensual hip rotations. Rather, Nazimova presents her body as a subject of unclear gender and sexual maturity, reflecting Wilde and Beardsley's ambivalent images of gendered bodies in *Salomé*. Next, she partly disappears beneath a large translucent veil, which she proceeds to manipulate with her hands in order to produce a stream of mutating shapes (Fig. 7). Somewhat dismissively, Lambert infers that this is Nazimova "falling back on her interpretive Isadora-style routine."[85] Nazimova herself made connections with the style of the Ballets Russes.[86] Visually, however, the resonances with Fuller's serpentine dances are striking. Stressing the centrality of the veil to the development of the choreography, Nazimova similarly eschews the primacy of her own body in favour of a more ambiguous kind of corporeality, allowing her billowing materials to construct and suggest forms as she moves. In this way, she departs from the precedent of more conspicuously erotic Salome choreographies, rendering her own body partly "unlocatable" as she creates the performance.

It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that critics at the time were disappointed and even perplexed by this scene. The reviewer for the *New York Times* declared it "an exceedingly tame and not remarkably graceful performance," and was perturbed by the dissonance between the dance itself and the reaction it precipitated in Herod and the other observers:

> Yet on the faces of Herod and the other onlookers you see expressions intended to indicate that such a dance as you have been led to imagine is being performed. It shows you part of it and in what you see there is nothing to account for the gross eagerness on the faces of the men.[87]

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[84] Studlar, "Out-Salomeing Salome," 493.

[85] Lambert, *Nazimova: A Biography*, 261.

[86] Ibid., 260

[87] "The Screen: A New Salome," *New York Times*, January 1, 1923, ProQuest.

The Dance of the Seven Veils. *Salomé.* 1923.

"Nothing" is what this reviewer sees as Salome dances, implying that the erotic revelation promised by the reputation of the dance of the seven veils fails to materialise. Yet it is precisely this asymmetry between the real and the fictitious spectators that underlines the subversive quality of Nazimova's performance. Those viewers who anticipate the dance with "gross eagerness" find their voyeuristic impulses reflected in the figure of Herod, a lascivious patriarch finally undone by Salome's creative bartering. Salome's body, however, disrupts the course of their imagination by resisting a final unveiling, instead orchestrating her dance from a position of relative visual obscurity. Recalling the techniques of Fuller, Nazimova makes her body's vanishing point the site of her creative power, recasting the veils as luminous surfaces complicit in her image-making system rather than accessories to her imagined nakedness. Far from reducing her body to its bare essentials, the veils enhance and expand her bodily presence, destabilising the gaze that seeks only a naked form and appealing instead to a subject attentive to the implications of her choreographic project, which prioritises female creative individualism and the reclaiming of the veiled dance.

By developing this conception of Salome as an ideal vessel for her ambitions in filmmaking and performance, Nazimova placed herself alongside those other female artists who used this figure to fashion new forms of bodily expression, recalibrating the modes of desire so often associated with Salome's dance. The set of relations constructed around the 1923 *Salomé*, formed between Nazimova and her collaborators, Wilde and Beardsley as spectral forebears, and the ambiguously positioned spectator, worked to unsettle the voyeuristic expectations attached to this woman and her imagined unveiling. *Salomé*'s grammar of poses and gestures invites aesthetic contemplation only to undercut an approach to the body as a fixed image, using the cinema's promise of motion to engage the audience's perception of their own moving, feeling, sensorial bodies. "[I]n every image there is always a kind of *ligatio* at work," writes Agamben; "a power that paralyses, whose spell needs to be broken; it is as if, from the whole history of art, a mute invocation were raised towards the freeing of the image in the gesture."[88] Casting and then breaking the spell of the image, Nazimova's *Salomé* presents its protagonist's dancing body as a force of alterity and visual effacement, disrupting desires with her serpentine motions and using Salome's veils to create a site of female resistance.

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[88] Agamben, "Notes on Gesture," 139.

"Dances yet unknown": Dulac's Visual Rhythms

Along with direct adaptations of Salome's story, of which Nazimova's was the most influential and sophisticated, film practitioners in both America and Europe were influenced in myriad and complex ways by the work of dancers. Dulac's theoretical writings on cinema, alongside her incorporation of choreographic forms into her films, show how dance was worked into the very fabric of filmmaking in the 1920s. In her 1927 essay "From Sentiment to Line," published in the only issue of her film journal *Schémas*, Dulac articulated a theory of cinematic composition that drew explicitly on the imagery and methods of dance:

> I conjure up a dancer! A woman? No. A leaping line of harmonious rhythms. I conjure up a luminous projection on a voile. Precise matter? No. Fluid rhythms. Why deny the screen pleasures that movement procures at the theatre. Harmony of line; harmony of light.[89]

Dulac's suggestion that the art of the cinema should take the image of the dancing line as its elemental form is part of a broader philosophy of movement that she espouses throughout the essay, and, indeed, practised in her own work. It was her belief that the first duty of cinema was to capture movement, and she asserts in the same article: "Movement and rhythm remain in any case – even in the more material and significant embodiment – the intimate and unique essence of cineographic expression."[90] Her understanding of movement as the fundamental and determining basis of the cinema resonates with Bergson's influential conception of vitalism, as articulated in works such as *Creative Evolution*. "In reality the body is changing form at every moment," declared Bergson; "or rather, there is no form, since form is immobile and reality is movement."[91] Dulac's appreciation of motion – specifically of motion designed to replicate the structures of a musical harmony – is couched in a certainty that the real purpose of movement is to enable "evolution and transformation."[92]

Best remembered for her collaboration with avant-garde dramaturg Antonin Artaud on *La Coquille et le Clergyman* (*The Seashell and the Clergyman*, 1928) – often

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[89] Germaine Dulac, "From Sentiment to Line," in *Red Velvet Seat: Women's Writing on the First Fifty Years of Cinema*, ed. Antonia Lant (London: Verso, 2006), 190.
[90] Ibid., 190.
[91] Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell (London: Macmillan, 1922), 319.
[92] Dulac, "From Sentiment to Line," 190.

considered the first example of Surrealist cinema – Dulac's legacy has been recovered in silent film studies following a period of neglect, and her importance as a theorist of early cinema in particular has been demonstrated.[93] Indeed, as Donia Mounsef has argued, Dulac's "concerns with rhythm, structure, and movement contradicted Surrealism's notion of a primitive and violent cinema," suggesting that Surrealism may not offer the only conceptual lens through which to explore her practice.[94] Dulac's theorisation of "cineographic expression" as a type of screen choreography can be positioned within wider debates about film aesthetics and narrative form, which preoccupied writers and artists in early twentieth-century France. Other filmmakers, including Émile Vuillermoz, felt Bergson's theories to be "a perfect apologia for cinégraphie," underpinning a conception of film as a representational rather than a narrative or action-based medium, more akin to music.[95] Like Dulac, Vuillermoz was heavily influenced by the aesthetics of Symbolism, which led him to conceive of actors as "astral bodies," beautiful but depersonalized signs delivered to the spectator by the filmmaker, who became a poet-figure imbuing the film with his own feeling and imagination.[96] Crucially, however, for Dulac the ideal cinematographic artist is not represented by the poet but by the modern dancer, who suggests and expresses form as she moves.

After watching Loïe Fuller's experiments with projection technology and choreography, Dulac was enthused about the possibilities afforded by a performance that took the movement of light as its basis: "Could light, like words, sounds, gestures, provoke emotion? Touch our sensibilities?"[97] As the terms "emotion" and "sensibilities" suggest, Dulac was intrigued by the range of sensory responses the cinema could precipitate beyond its optical effects, reaching towards the modern kinaesthetic embodied by various dancers and film performers, such as Nazimova, whom she admired. Indeed, the silently performing body appeared to be imbued with a magnetic significance through the mechanisms of film. As Marcus has observed,

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[93] See Tami Williams, "Toward the Development of a Modern 'Impressionist' Cinema: Germaine Dulac's *La Belle Dame sans Merci* (1921) and the Deconstruction of the Femme Fatale Archetype," *Framework* 51, no. 2 (2010): 404-419. E. Ann Kaplan, "The Avant-Gardes in Europe and the USA," in *Women & Film: Both Sides of the Camera* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 85-90; Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, "The Image and the Spark: Dulac and Artaud Reviewed," *Dada/ Surrealism* 15 (1986): 110-127.

[94] Donia Mounsef, "Women Filmmakers and the Avant-Garde: From Dulac to Duras," in *Women Filmmakers: Refocusing*, ed. Jacqueline Levitin, Judith Plessis and Valerie Raoul (London: Routledge, 2003), 44-45.

[95] Émile Vuillermoz, quoted in Richard Abel, "On the Threshold of French Film Theory and Criticism: 1915-1919," *Cinema Journal* 25 (1985): 22.

[96] Ibid., 21.

[97] Germaine Dulac, "Trois Recontres avec Loïe Fuller," in *Écrits,* 109.

understandings of the "speaking" body – of a language of corporeal movement and expression – "further intersected […] with the ideals of the 'elemental' gesture and physical expressiveness developed and developing in symbolist, expressionist and avant-garde theatre[.]"[98] Tami Williams has shown that Dulac was deeply interested in Symbolist theatre, particularly the work of Maurice Maeterlinck, whose emphasis on deliberate symbolic motion in performance bears a close relevance not only to Dulac's own understanding of cinematic language, but also to the sculptural grammar of performance elaborated in Nazimova's *Salomé*.[99] Dulac's appreciation of Symbolist aesthetics was also developed in part through her friendships with the "mystic" director Aurelien Marie Lugné-Poë, who first produced Wilde's *Salomé* in 1896, and his wife, the actor Suzanne Després, who also acted in this production.[100]

Such networks of collaboration and influence were formative to the interplays between literary, cinematic, and choreographic aesthetics during this period, clarifying with peculiar frequency around the figure of Salome. Like many of the women who danced as Salome and adapted her story, Dulac had lesbian relationships, and it was during her relationship with the Russian dancer Stasia Napierkowska that her interests in Salome and in the rhythmic movements of the feminine body began to emerge.[101] In late 1911, Napierkowska had gained a colourful reputation in London by performing *The Dance of the Bee* at the Palace Theatre, which, according to Brandstetter, "harked back to nineteenth-century ballet versions of the bee dance; movement forms taken from *freir Tanz*; and eclectic components of 'exotic' dance," combining a variety of styles and movement techniques.[102] The symbolic and political contiguities shared by *The Dance of the Bee* and Salome's dance are implicit in the narrative framing Napierkowska's performance: she plays the role of a Moroccan Princess who, under the orders of the Chief holding her captive, performs the "dance of the bee," removing her clothes at his pleasure before she collapses, and finally performs a dance of self-sacrifice, "la Danse du Feu."[103] As the *Pall Mall Magazine* reported in an article entitled "The Invasion of the Dancers," Napierkowska moved in "a paroxysm of excitement and pain caused by the bee in the folds of her garments." She removed items of clothing "one after the other" in a sequence of unveiling strikingly resonant

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[98] Marcus, *The Tenth Muse*, 10.
[99] Williams, *Cinema of Sensations*, 41-42.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Ibid., 51-52.
[102] Brandstetter, *Poetics of Dance*, 172-173.
[103] Ibid., 174.

of erotic versions of Salome's dance, which had of course achieved recent popularity in England through Maud Allan's *Vision*.[104] Indeed, *The Dance of the Bee* incited similar moral anxieties for the writer of the article, H. M. Walbrook, who called it "a daring performance […] symptomatic of a certain broadening of public taste."[105] The article's rhetoric of invasions and paroxysms suggests that the violent ecstasies of Wilde's princess had not been forgotten, even if Napierkowska's dance appeared to transmute them into a comic setting, albeit one couched in a sinister tale of female imprisonment and supplication.

Intriguingly, however, the terms used to delineate Napierkowska's choreography reflected with uncanny exactitude the lexical choices exercised by reviewers of Nazimova's stage performances and Fuller's earlier experiments with serpentine movement: as one critic put it, "the serpentine Mlle Napierkowska continues to wriggle herself out of her clothes. […] "[H]er strong point is […] serpentine coilings of the body."[106] Grounded in kinaesthetic experience, the serpentine imagery that this chapter has traced across dance performances and silent film illustrates Irina Sirotkina and Roger Smith's claim that early twentieth-century artists existed in "a cultural world deeply informed by the metaphors of touch, movement and life, that is, by metaphors of bodily sensing thought to transcend social and artistic conventions."[107] With astonishing regularity, such metaphors, which find their strongest base in invocations of choreography, appear in relation to Salome's veiled dance.

Napierkowska's *Dance of the Bee*, for example, was an oblique play on the theme of unveiling, but she addressed this connection more explicitly in her two screen performances as Salome: in Albert Capellani's *Salomé* (1908) and Ugo Falena's *La Figlia de Herodiade* (1916), both distributed by Pathé.[108] According to enthusiastic critics, the second of these films saw Napierkowska, "the great Russian danseuse," perform "the chief part with distinction," reminding audiences of the "stir" caused by her *Dance of the Bee*.[109] Unfortunately, both of these silent films appear to have been lost, although surviving images from Falena's *La Figlia de Herodiade*, his second film

104 H. M. Walbrook, "The Invasion of the Dancers," *Pall Mall Magazine*, 1912, 26, ProQuest.
105 Walbrook, "The Invasion of the Dancers," 26.
106 "The Censor Again: 'Hardy Plays' At Dorchester," *The Times of India,* December 12, 1911, ProQuest.
107 Irina Sirotkina and Roger Smith, *The Sixth Sense of the Avant-Garde: Dance, Kinaesthesia and the Arts in Revolutionary Russia* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 5.
108 David J. Shepherd, *The Bible on Silent Film: Spectacle, Story and Scripture in the Early Cinema* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 199.
109 "Dancing on Screen: Napierkowska's Masterpiece," *The Times of India*, July 20, 1916, ProQuest.

adaptation of Wilde's *Salomé*, show Napierkowska in scant oriental costume wielding a large translucent veil. It is almost certain that Dulac was intimately familiar with this work, since she accompanied Napierkowska on her film shoots in Rome while the dancer was working with Falena.[110] Moreover, after seeing Napierkowska take the lead role in a production of Strauss's *Salome*, and a private performance of Ida Rubinstein's *Salomé* choreographed by Fokine in 1912, Dulac drew sketches for a planned staging of Wilde's *Salomé* to be directed by Maurice Maeterlinck.[111] As this intricate set of historical connections show, Salome was an important figure in Dulac's developing artistic consciousness, embodied before her eyes by dancers such as Napierkowska and Rubinstein.

The legacies of Dulac's interest in dance and in Salome particularly can be traced through her depictions of Decadent female performers in films like *Vénus Victrix* (1917), which stars Napierkowska as Djali, a bewitching Hindu dancer who "danced dances yet unknown." This film reformulates, at least on the surface, many of the oriental tropes and attitudes common in various interpretations of Salome's story, which conjured vague images of the East as a topography of sexual excess.[112] It was Ida Rubinstein's performances as Salome and Scheherazade that provided apt models for the gestural vocabulary of Napierkowska in *Vénus Victrix,* confirming the influence of Salome's dance on the film's visual register, as well as the expansive kinaesthetic community of women focused around this compelling figure.[113]

Vénus Victrix concerns a theatre owner who intends to desert his wife for the dancer Djali, a plot that reflects historical fears – expressed in various news sources – that "dancers [were] natural disturbers of the family peace."[114] As one *Washington Post* journalist put it, "the light toe creates more trouble in the household than the light purse." The comparison next made by this journalist is inevitable: "[O]f course, there was the justly famous Salome."[115] Yet in *Vénus Victrix*, as Williams has argued, Dulac's adoption of oriental and choreographic imagery does more than merely exoticise Napierkowska's body.[116] As the case of Nazimova demonstrates, the imaginative possibilities afforded by the very idea of the Orient enabled feminist

[110] Williams, *Cinema of Sensations*, 52.
[111] Ibid., 52.
[112] Ibid., 70.
[113] Ibid., 69.
[114] "Science Explains their Fascination," *Washington Post*, March 15, 1914, ProQuest.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Williams, *Cinema of Sensations,* 70.

interventions, representing "women's physical and spiritual emancipation from a fixed social category" through its associations with migration, mobility, and discovery.[117] Despite being saturated in anxieties about female desire, those news reports describing the domestic estrangements caused by dancers highlight a similar kind of feminist potential. Apparently at the heart of matrimonial discord, dancers did not appear to be bound by the logic of patriarchal convention or sexual orthodoxy.

While it is possible to retrospectively read the symmetries between Dulac's cinematic philosophy and her interest in particular dancers, Dulac herself articulated similar connections, declaring, "It's alongside this beautiful artist Napierkowska, and thanks to her, that I learned the secrets of the cinegraphic art."[118] Formulating the mechanisms of film as a "secret," Dulac implies a potential association between her practice as a filmmaker and the clandestine nature of her queer relationships, as well as the ambivalence of queer women's bodies. Williams notes that Napierkowska used to send Dulac sketches of "curved and spiral-like poses and movements (laying down, knees up, floating), provocatively labelled 'tendrils,' 'trembling,' and 'spinning.'"[119] Curves and spirals suggest the female form, and the description of floating, tendril-like objects corresponds to the spectral qualities so often attached to sex between women, and also staged in Fuller's apparitional performances with light.[120] Furthermore, these curved and spiralling lines directly correspond to the kinaesthetic of "torsion" critiqued by Schwartz, suggesting a mutable, serpentine form of movement unfolding from the body's radiant centre, once again denoting a connection between the rhythms of cinematic modernity and sapphic eroticism. Both appear to be based on an internal harmony that resists, or at least supersedes, the conventions of narrative logic: while the queer woman has often been positioned theoretically against existing categories of gender and representation,[121] Dulac's understanding of "*cinégraphie*" emphasised the construction of a poetic symbolism opposed to linear narrative forms.

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[117] Williams, *Cinema of Sensations*, 70.

[118] Germaine Dulac, quoted in Ibid., 53.

[119] Williams notes the significance of these illustrations in Ibid., 52.

[120] Drawing on Terry Castle's work, Elizabeth English examines the metaphor of the "spectral lesbian body" in *Lesbian Modernism: Censorship, Sexuality and Genre Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 60-61.

[121] As Monique Wittig writes, "Thus a lesbian *has* to be something else, a not-woman, a not-man, a product of society, not a product of nature, for there is no nature in society." See "One is not Born a Woman," in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. Vincent B. Leitch et al. (London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010), 1908.

Furthermore, as this emphasis on rhythmic unity suggests, early film theorists were drawn to the lexicons of music and choreography in their efforts to explain the representational functions of cinematic movement, which seemed to reflect dance's ability to unify form and content in the motions of the body through space. In this sense, Dulac imagined the purpose of cinema in similar terms to Vuillermoz, who coined the influential term "symphonies of light" – redolent of Fuller's luminous choreographies – and who particularly admired the American director D. W. Griffith for his ability to "harmonize his plastic phrases."[122] The film critic and producer Louis Delluc, with whom Dulac worked closely, shared some of Vuillermoz's ideas and promoted a "lyrical" style of filmmaking, in which a central idea should be "articulated symbolically or connotatively through the photogenic becoming cinematic."[123] Stressing the singularity of the cinematic image and the transformative powers of the camera, Delluc developed the concept of "*photogénie*," which influenced the later writings of André Bazin, among others. According to Richard Abel, "*photogénie* de-familiarized the familiar," taking the real as the basis for cinematic representation but preserving film's capacity to make it "radically new."[124] "Thanks to the *photogénie* of movement," Jean Epstein declared in terms that strongly echo Bergson, "the cinematograph shows us that form is only one unsettled state of an essentially mobile condition."[125] As these critiques suggest, the play of light on a moving screen, so critical to the development of modern dance, also underpinned a range of approaches to the status of the cinematic image, which, for Dulac as for Nazimova, unfolded (or uncoiled) in a manner akin to serpentine choreography.

The theoretical positions that formed around the development of the Seventh Art in the early twentieth century echoed earlier responses to the emergence of modern dance, similarly drawing on the rhetorical tropes of other arts to formulate new aesthetic categories and interpretive tools. For Rancière, the production of specific artistic scenes and the responses they engender in turn re-inscribe these moments into "a moving constellation in which modes of perception and affect, and forms of interpretations defining a paradigm of art, take shape."[126] The extent to which Dulac's interest in dance and her reflections on "*cinégraphie*" constellated

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[122] Vuillermoz, quoted in Abel, "On the Threshold of French Film Theory," 25.

[123] Ibid.

[124] Ibid., 23.

[125] Jean Epstein, "To a Second Reality, a Second Reason [1947]," trans. Sarah Keller, in *Critical Essays and New Translations*, 322.

[126] Rancière, *Aisthesis*, xi.

around Salome is fascinating, as the performances of Napierkowska and Rubinstein influenced her own directorial vision and theoretical writings, illustrating the continuous reciprocity of choreographic and cinematographic forms of movement in the early twentieth century.

Arabesques and "Ciné-dances"

Dulac's interest in oriental aesthetics and choreography persisted across a number of her films after *Vénus Victrix,* including *Malencontre* (1920), which starred the Franco-Indonesian dancer Djemil Anik. Anik's syntax of gestures and poses, apparently directly inspired by Nazimova, defined the film's field of movement, described by the critic Jean Morizot as "a science of postures and eurhythmy pushed to perfection."[127] Surviving stills from *Malencontre* show Anik dressed in studded veils and an ornate jewelled headpiece, posing seductively in the manner of a Salome dancer. However, by the late 1920s, Dulac's cinematographic vision had become somewhat more abstract, leading her to produce a series of three short films in which the female body is displaced from its previous position at the centre of the screen's visual register, but in which dance nonetheless remains the critical force threading the images together. In this way, Dulac contributed to the catalogue of "unlocatable bodies" this thesis has explored thus far, creating a choreography for the cinema that departed from the presentation of the female body as the primary object of attention, instead foregrounding movement and transformation as the foundation of her cineographic expression.

In her well-known essay "The Cinema" (1926), Virginia Woolf claimed that film might do better if it paid less heed to the conventions of literature and theatre; if it were able to discover "something abstract, something moving, something calling only for the very slightest help from words or from music to make itself intelligible."[128] Perhaps Woolf had the language of dance in mind – she was certainly a ballet enthusiast, and images of human movement in her own novels often hover, as Jones has argued, "on the borderlands between quite ordinary gestures and a more formalized, ritualized activity."[129] Eager to defend the novel against the stultifying

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[127] Jean Morizot, quoted in Williams, *Cinema of Sensations*, 109.

[128] Virginia Woolf, "The Cinema," in *Selected Essays*, ed. David Bradshaw (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 175.

[129] Jones, *Literature, Modernism and Dance*, 129.

effects of adaptation, Woolf alluded to a "new mode of symbolization […] capable of conveying the emotions in visual terms."[130] Her ideas about the cinema's representational capacities, although couched in sceptical prose, were not entirely divorced from Dulac's, or indeed from the sorts of theories advanced by Vuillermoz and Delluc. Dulac similarly criticised straightforward adaptations of novels in her essay "The Music of Silence" (1928), arguing for the cinema's role as an expressive medium, in which "the clarity of its images should suggest rather than specify, creating, like music, through particular chords, that which is imperceptible".[131] Developing her concept of "*the silence of the eye*," Dulac argued that "although cinema may, in its technique, be solely visual […] it disdains the purely visual," appealing to the spectator's richer sensory and emotional life through the dynamic rhythms that instil vital meaning in its images.[132] She had previously explained in "Photographie – Cinégraphie" (1926) that she felt "hostile towards the photographic effect that removes from the art of the screen the spontaneity in movement."[133] As Cheryl Hindrichs has observed, by rejecting the formal constraints of linear narrative, both Woolf and Dulac participated in a feminist "lyrical" avant-garde, "encouraging audiences to venture further in exploring experience and sense beyond the habitual."[134] It was, moreover, dance that provided Dulac with the closest model for her cinematographic vision, which evolved into the kind of moving abstractions from which Woolf imagined the cinema might devise its new language.

Forms of organic evolution, as well as the automatic movements of machines, underpin much of Dulac's work. She frequently illustrated her lectures with scientific films of germinating wheat grains, attempting to give the "spirit a sensation, which through movements is rhythmed by forms, whose undefinable structures vary incessantly following a given rhythm."[135] Dulac puts this principle of formal variation within a consistent rhythm into practice in her short film *Thèmes et Variations* (1929). This abstract work disregards narrative realism in favour of a coherence based on imagistic and rhythmic repetition and development. Dulac intercuts shots of a ballerina, Lilian Constantini, dancing gracefully with images of machines spinning and

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[130] Marcus, *The Tenth Muse*, 117.
[131] Dulac, "The Music of Silence," in *Red Velvet Seat*, 218.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Dulac, "Photographie—Cinégraphie," in *Écrits*, 80.
[134] Cheryl Hindrichs, "Feminist Optics and Avant-Garde Cinema: Germaine Dulac's 'The Smiling Madame Beudet' and Virginia Woolf's 'Street Haunting," *Feminist Studies* 35 (2009): 307; 317.
[135] Marcel Zahar and Daniel Burret, "Une heure chez Mme. Germaine Dulac," *Cinéa-Ciné pour Tous*, no. 63 (June 1926): 13-14. Translated and cited by Williams, *Cinema of Sensations*, 154.

unreeling along the same lines of movement. "Each movement of the animated dance is developed by a variation, drawn from life and sometimes extended by simple abstract lines," wrote Dulac in her screenplay for this short work.[136] This sequence also includes a brief, time-lapsed shot of a germinating plant, referred to by Dulac as a "ciné-dance."[137] This blossoming life form is juxtaposed with an image of the dancer's hands, as they twist and unfurl to create an impression of swan-like movement. The plant's tendrils suggestively imitate the coiling gestures of the hands, allowing for a mirroring between the two that defines the film's broader scheme of visual metaphor. Presenting the plant's evolution in a compressed time frame, the cinematic apparatus exceeds human perceptual limits, rapidly accelerating a lengthy process in order to satisfy the film's compositional framework.

For Dulac, these techniques, like slow motion, "[augment] the number of recorded images, allow[ing] us to analyse the logic of a movement's beauty," which she describes as "the invisible, the materially existent that lies beyond our visual perception."[138] In this sense, the "ciné-dance" in *Thèmes et Variations* exemplifies the filmmaker's own play on the concept of the invisible dance, whose long history this thesis has traced through Wilde and Fuller to women's filmmaking in the 1920s. For Dulac, Fuller's body was "*un corps invisible*"; "An invisible body melted into the diaphanous materials," which offered a vital precedent for the cinema's incorporation of light and action into a mobile screen.[139] The "ciné-dance" of *Thèmes et Variations* denotes symmetries between the gestures of the dancer and the blossoming of a miniscule life form, as well as the torsion of the machinery. In this way, the mechanisms of the film, created and edited by Dulac, make the "invisible" dance of and *between* these forms perceptible, occluding and yet expanding the body of the dancer (who is only shot in part) and also, of course, the woman filmmaker who choreographs the images. For Dulac, this work was "un véritable ballet" ["a real ballet"].[140]

Fuller's choreographic techniques, in Gunning's opinion, encouraged Dulac to "discover in nature new forms of motion […], the pulsating, intricate, even dissonant rhythms of the arabesque and the serpentine, expanding and recoiling

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[136] Paris, Cinémathèque Française, Fonds Germaine Dulac, 80-B8. My translation.
[137] Williams, *Cinema of Sensations*, 154.
[138] Dulac, "The Music of Silence," 217.
[139] Dulac, "Trois Rencontres," 109.
[140] CF, FGD 80-B8.

simultaneously."[141] The complex sensory effects of Fuller's particular movement vocabulary are implicit in Dulac's recollection of Fuller's dance, which she describes as "another music, this time a visual one, […] revealed to me almost stealthily."[142] The mobile torsion of the serpentine and arabesque, distinct but not entirely dissimilar lines, recur in Dulac's own short films, particularly *Étude cinégraphique sur une Arabesque* (1929). Often associated with Islamic art but common through European aesthetic traditions, the arabesque is defined as a "decorative scroll-work and other ornament loosely derived from branches, leaves, tendrils, and vegetation […] arranged in imaginatively intertwined symmetrical geometrical patterns."[143] Perhaps the spinning "tendrils" Napierkowska sent to Dulac emerge again in the latter's fascination with this form. Importantly, the arabesque is "usually defined as free from human or animal figures,"[144] suggesting that its intertwining lines offered Dulac a blueprint for the kind of abstract forms she sought to choreograph in her films of the late 1920s, recalling the concealed body of Fuller in her serpentine dances.

The arabesque is also a "florid, decorative piece of music" and a basic position in classical ballet, in which "The dancer stands on one leg (either bent or straight), with the other extended behind with a straight knee and pointed foot. The arms are held in various positions that harmoniously extend the line of the arabesque."[145] As the film's title implies therefore, Dulac's *Arabesques* codified a range of stylistic connections across the arts of music, dance, and architecture. Indeed, Dulac described *Arabesques* and her other short film *Disque 957* (1928) as "*illustrations de disques*," or "illustrated records," standing as visual counterparts to the music they invoke (Debussy's *Arabesques 1 and 2*, and Chopin's *Préludes 5 and 6*).[146] In *Arabesques*, Dulac's camera lingers on the motions of objects and life forms – the interaction between rain and the rippling surface of water, and the play of light in a kaleidoscope. Movement itself is the film's subject, and it connects the series of apparently disparate images: a delicate flower in bloom; a veiled woman on a rocking chair; the fluttering of sheets in the wind. The woman who briefly appears in *Arabesques*, largely draped in white materials and obscured by the rapid cuts of the director, is "veiled" by both

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[141] Gunning, "Light, Motion, Cinema!," 115.

[142] Dulac, "Trois Rencontres," 109.

[143] James Stevens Curl, "arabesque," in *A Dictionary of Architecture and Landscape Architecture*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), Oxford Reference.

[144] Ibid.

[145] "arabesque," in *The Oxford Companion to Music*, Oxford Music Online; Debra Craine and Judith Mackrell, "arabesque," in *The Oxford Dictionary of Dance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 19.

[146] Germaine Dulac, "La nouvelle évolution," in *Écrits,* 136.

her costume and the workings of the camera, allowing the cinematic apparatus to engage in the transformation of this particular female body – a figure Gunning reads as an allusion to the veiled Loïe Fuller.[147] As Flitterman-Lewis has argued, Dulac's theories of cinematic composition were based on "a Symbolist aesthetic of fusion and synthesis," which, for Mallarmé, Dulac and others, took on its elemental shape in Fuller's veiled choreographies of light.[148] Although the dancers of *Vénus Victrix* and *Malencontre* might appear to reformulate the myth of Salome more directly, the mechanism of her veiled dance – along with its promise of female creative individualism and expressive meaning – resurface in Dulac's *Arabesques*, another "ciné-dance" that uses both the image and the function of the veil to explore the conditions of visibility on screen.

Severed and Whole: A Sublime Dancer

Even where Salome appears to have vanished, then, traces of her veiled dance can be detected. The serpentine lines and arabesques that work as Dulac's organising principles appear across early twentieth-century films and live performances, following in the wake of Fuller's luminous choreographies, and the spirals and torsions of performers including Nazimova, Napierkowska, Rubinstein, and the dancers of the Ballets Russes. The reciprocity between choreographic forms and cinema culture during this period is clear. Oskar Fischinger's *Spirals* (1926), for instance, is far more visually disorienting than Dulac's *Arabesques*, but it too is invested in the effects of continuous motion and its variations, with its kaleidoscope of moving spirals on black or luminous centres. Filmmakers of this period continuously turned to the whirling cogs, spinning discs, and crunching levers of machines for inspiration; to "the swing, tramp, and trudge […] the carriages, motor cars, omnibuses, cans, sandwich men shuffling and swinging" that Woolf found everywhere in the rush and clamour of the modern world.[149] In these same phenomena, however, writers and artists sensed an inexorable rhythm that pulsed on; "the sound of wheels chime and chatter in queer harmony."[150]

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[147] Gunning, "Light, Motion, Cinema!," 120.
[148] Flitterman-Lewis, "The Image and the Spark," 114-115.
[149] Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, ed. David Bradshaw (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 4.
[150] Ibid., 58.

What is striking is the sheer extent of Salome's imaginative reach during this period, and the manner in which Nazimova, Dulac, and other women modified her image to suit their creative agendas in silent films of the 1920s. Moreover, this exploration has by no means exhausted the rich history of Salome on screen. J. Stuart Blackton's *Salome* (1908) was the first silent film to dramatise the narrative, and the surviving sections of the film suggest that Blackton's sources were the biblical texts rather than Wilde's play, since the early parts of the film emphasise the Baptist's role as a spiritual leader, rather than Salome's erotic or violent impulses. *Salome Mad* (1909) is a more unusual work, which follows the comic protagonist George as he chases a poster of Salome, his "ideal woman," across the town. When the poster ends up submerged in the harbour, he dives after it only to find himself swimming in a surreal underwater scene, in which mermaid-like women dance for him until Salome herself arrives to perform. Before he can watch her dance, a fisherman hooks George back up, and so Salome remains, as in so many of her afterlives, unattainable and elusive. Finally, in Tod Browning's *The Show* (1927), Salome's dance is one of the many acts to entertain a hypnotised crowd at a variety show. When Salome (Renée Adorée) performs the dance of the seven veils, the camera cuts to the audience and there is a moment of suggestive contrast posed between the leering gaze of men and the astonished, transfixed stare of women. The prospect of a different kind of spectatorship, a possible desire in difference, arises momentarily in this view of a divided crowd.

What re-emerges as a source of anxiety in Browning's film, however, is the severed head, fully concealed in Nazimova's *Salomé* beneath the skirts of the dancer, and all but lost in Dulac's screen choreographies, which prioritise rhythmic harmony over the shock of psychic juxtaposition favoured by her one-time collaborator Antonin Artaud.[151] The act of decapitation, one of the illusions performed by the troupe in *The Show*, turns into a real threat when Salome's spurned lover (Lionel Barrymore) replaces the false sword with a true one. In an inversion of the original myth, Salome recognises the difference and manages to save the life of the actor playing John (John Gilbert), ironically preserving the wholeness of the Baptist's body while confronting the possibility of its severance. With this, audiences are reminded of the enduring connection between Salome's performance and the act of violence it

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[151] For Flitterman-Lewis, Artaud's conceptual "allegiance to Surrealism required a degree of violence in the work of art powerful enough to achieve that psychic directness of the Freudian dream-work"; see "The Image and the Spark," 114.

precipitates. Writing about the decollation of John the Baptist in *The Severed Head: Capital Visions*, Julia Kristeva proposes that these images and their theme "mark the first crossroads in modern figuration. [...] [W]e must be prepared to *experience* the figure, severed *and* whole, in its severing *and* its dance: to inhabit it, rigid *and* fleeting, violent *and* happy, blood *and* spirit, horror *and* promise."[152] For Kristeva, Salome is "the sublime woman" who embodies the "horror of the feminine," without which horror would have no power at all.[153] From the start, this thesis has sought to complicate such an interpretation of Salome, which revives the problematic image of the dancer as "the heroine of a decadentism without values," overlooking her potential for feminist reinventions.[154] Yet the uncanny image of the severed head, with its attending fears about female hostility, makes a conspicuous return in the 1930s: in the work of Artaud and the Surrealists, but perhaps most conspicuously, in the dance-dramas of W. B. Yeats.

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[152] Julia Kristeva, *The Severed Head: Capital Visions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 65-66.
[153] Ibid., 110.
[154] Ibid.

CHAPTER FOUR
"Herodias' Daughters have Returned Again": W. B. Yeats and the Ideal Body

In May 1905, W. B. Yeats wrote to the American lawyer and collector John Quinn to express his distaste for a performance he had just seen in London. The play was the first production in England of Wilde's *Salomé*, performed privately at the Bijou Theatre without much critical success.[1] In his letter, Yeats suggests that the play's author was better suited to the demands of comedy, and that his talents were lost on this "unactable literary drama," which "has every sort of fault."[2] Echoing the perplexed responses to Nazimova's adaptation, Yeats, too, felt as if he had been denied the imagined "thrill" of Salome's dance – he could not understand the "great outcry against its repulsiveness" as he had "felt nothing," and emerged from the theatre disappointed.[3] In much the same vein, he later described *Salomé* to T. Sturge Moore as "thoroughly bad," "empty, sluggish & pretentious": a harsh verdict indeed.[4] Over the decades, however, the image of Salome recurred with surprising frequency across Yeats's work: in his letters, poems, and, most notably, his plays for dancers. Through these iterations of Salome, we can see how the very idea of dance lodged itself in Yeats's dramatic imagination, offering him a vital model for the unified aesthetic he sought so keenly to create in poetry and in his work for the stage. Paying particular attention to the dance-dramas *At the Hawk's Well* and *The King of the Great Clock Tower,* this chapter shows how Yeats's ideas about the role of the poet-dramatist shaped his responses to the qualities of control and depersonalisation he found so effective in dance, and how this in turn determined the nature of his collaborations with trained dancers for his plays. Situating Yeats in relation to the cultural ferment of the fin-de-siècle, and to the pervasive, complex influences of Wilde and Loïe Fuller, I show how Yeats's reformulations of the Salome myth crystallise around the peculiarities of the creative relationship between playwright and dancer, a bond not without its anxieties and moments of imbalance.

As the letter to Quinn suggests, Yeats often masked the considerable impact that Wilde's *Salomé* had on his vision for the theatre, to which he hoped to bring "a

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[1] William Tydeman and Steven Price, *Wilde: Salome,* 40.
[2] WBY to John Quinn, 29 May [1905], *CL InteLex* 160.
[3] Ibid.
[4] WBY to T. Sturge Moore, 6 May [1906], *CL InteLex* 401.

remote, spiritual and ideal" drama, divorced from the "stupefying" theatre of commerce.[5] Despite Yeats's reservations about the execution of the performances of *Salomé* he saw, this chapter shows how Wilde's Symbolist dancer aligned with Yeats's developing approach to the moving body as part of a broader dramatic and symbolic programme. For Kermode, the figure of Salome is intrinsic to any reading of Yeatsian aesthetics: "[W]henever Yeats refers back to the historical concept of unity of being, or to the aesthetic one of beauty as a perfectly proportioned human body, the image of Salome is likely to occur to him."[6] In her important study *The Plays of W. B. Yeats: Yeats and the Dancer*, Sylvia Ellis observes, following Kermode's model, that the "ideal" dancer, for Yeats, was, crucially, an impersonal force: in Loïe Fuller's case, "pure abstraction as the flesh and blood of the living woman became subsumed into the flowing illuminated draperies."[7] While it is true that Yeats stressed the importance of impersonality in his performers – and often sought to control every aspect of dramatic productions – his writing on dance, and on Salome in particular, created unresolved tensions between the authorial force of the playwright and the bodily presence of the dancer. The emergence of dancers as shaping forces within particular texts leaves open the possibility of an ambivalent and nuanced conception of the dancer's subjective position within the works this chapter considers.

Salome, for Yeats, was not an easily assimilated image, but was rather associated with uncontrollable forms – with the ambiguous feminine power of the Sidhe, and with the complex moral and aesthetic creeds of Decadence and Symbolism, which continued to exert a hold on Yeats's work in the 1920s and 1930s. Yeats may, as Ellis argues, offer "dance as a transfiguration of words into another medium" and prioritise "the dancer as abstraction"; as the unification of form and content that eclipses the (often female) body producing it. Yet the "plays for dancers" were, crucially, *for* dancers – for performers trained to actively engage in the process of choreographic interpretation. Exploring the contributions of the dancers Michio Ito and Ninette de Valois to the evolution of Yeats's dramatic imagination and to specific texts, I show how Yeats's complicated reinventions of the Salome theme accounted for the creative individualism and corporeal involvement of the performers on stage. As Yeats acknowledged in his Preface to the *Four Plays for Dancers* (1921),

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[5] W. B. Yeats, "The Theatre," in *The Major Works*, 366.
[6] Kermode, *Romantic Image*, 76.
[7] Sylvia Ellis, *The Plays of W. B. Yeats: Yeats and the Dancer* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1995), 162.

"the dancing will give me the most trouble, for I know but vaguely what I want."[8] This chapter contends that Yeats came to understand dance as part of a dramatic system that largely drew its tenets from writers and designers indebted to Symbolism, including Wilde, Arthur Symons, and Edward Gordon Craig, but that he depended on professional dancers to clarify what could only ever present itself to him in "vague" terms.

Although he was fascinated by dance and enthralled by the modern demonstrations of the Ballets Russes, Yeats had little knowledge of dance as a craft. The dynamic interplays between real and imagined bodies in his dance-dramas unsettle common conceptions of how Yeats approached the problematic element of the human body in the work of art, and therefore how he interpreted Salome's dance. Representing the necessary fusion of content and form, the dancer was not only a conceptual model for Yeats's poetics, but also a means of experimenting with performance and the nature of movement in the modern theatre. This chapter therefore takes its lead from the famous concluding couplet of "Among School Children" (1928): "O body swayed to music, O brightening glance, / How can we know the dancer from the dance?" (*VP*, 446). For Yeats, this is not simply a rhetorical question but a concern he addressed from a dramatic perspective, in terms of real bodies and performance methods.

Revising *Salomé*: Yeats, Wilde, and Symbolism

To understand Yeats's reinterpretations of the figure of Salome, it is necessary to explore his complex responses to Wilde, who shared with Yeats certain symbolic and aesthetic concerns, such as, Worth notes, "his philosophy of masks and his fascination with marionettes and mirrors."[9] Wilde occupies a contradictory status in Yeats's reflections on the literature of the late nineteenth century: on the one hand, Yeats describes Wilde as merely "a wit and a critic [who] could not endure his limitations,"[10] yet he also muses at length on his memories of the elder Irishman in *The Trembling of the Veil*. Recalling his "astonishment" at meeting a man who was capable of "talking in perfect sentences, as if he had written them all overnight with

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[8] W. B. Yeats, "Preface," in *Four Plays for Dancers* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1921), v.
[9] Worth, *Irish Drama*, 113.
[10] WBY to T. Sturge Moore, 6 May [1906], *CL InteLex* 401.

labour and yet all spontaneous," Yeats seems captivated by the memory of Wilde's wit and rhetorical skill, which here appears as form of constrained spontaneity, a quality he also found in dance.[11] When Wilde experienced his crippling public decline during his trials in 1895, Yeats was much moved, telling his friend Edward Dowden, "I went to try and see Wilde today to tell him how much I sympathised with him in his trouble."[12] Furthermore, he speculated that Florence Darragh, whom he first saw in Wilde's *Salomé*, might be "the finest tragedian on the English stage."[13] Clearly, the image of Wilde, and the image of his dancer, lingered long in Yeats's memory, and although he criticised many aspects of the *Salomé* he saw performed, it resonated powerfully with his own theatrical ambitions. Indeed, Salome was integrated into Yeats's vision of a national poetic drama that would reimagine Irish myth in the space of a modern theatre. As such, he adapted and deviated from Wilde's model of the dancer by incorporating dance into a particular kind of dramatic space, formed through his work with modern directors and set designers.

Following in Worth's wake, a number of critics have drawn out the intertextual resonances that echo between Wilde and Yeats's work. Charles Armstrong has traced the parallels between Wilde's *Salomé* and Yeats's *The Resurrection* (1931) in their treatment of religious and sacrificial themes, arguing that the latter works as an intriguing experiment in genre and modernist abstraction.[14] Noreen Doody has also excavated the rich Wildean ground of Yeats's oeuvre, focusing on Yeats's use of specific symbols including "the gaze, the moon, the kiss, dance, and severed head," to show how he revised his plays with the spectre of *Salomé* in mind.[15] Doody claims that Yeats's reworked versions of plays like *At the Hawk's Well* and *The King of the Great Clock Tower* indicate that the status of certain motifs "within Yeats's metaphysical and poetic aesthetic was directed in its initial stages by the thought of Oscar Wilde."[16] Drawing on Harold Bloom's account of tradition and influence in *The Anxiety of Influence*, she concludes that Yeats transcends Wilde's legacy by creating a more symbolically rich and cohesive dramatic system, thus rendering Wilde's original work

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[11] Yeats, *The Trembling of the Veil,* 124.
[12] WBY to Edward Dowden, 6 January [1895], *CL InteLex* 18.
[13] WBY to J. B. Yeats, 21 July [1906], *CL InteLex* 435.
[14] Charles I. Armstrong, *Reframing Yeats: Genre, Allusion, and History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 63-76.
[15] Noreen Doody, "'An Echo of Someone Else's Music': The Influence of Oscar Wilde on W. B. Yeats," in *The Importance of Reinventing Oscar: Versions of Wilde During the Last 100 Years,* ed. Uwe Böker, et. al (New York: Rodopi, 2002), 175-188.
[16] Ibid., 178.

"an echo of someone else's music."[17] Certainly, Bloom's understanding of anxiety and his concept of poetic "misprision" can be useful tools for considering the course of Wilde's dancer. Borrowing the term "clinamen" from Lucretius, Bloom develops an understanding of poetic influence as a phenomenon that begins with the poet's "swerve" from his precursor's work, which "appears as a corrective movement in his own poem."[18] However, Bloom's model has its limits, many of which have already been fully articulated in feminist critiques by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, who rightly point out that such a model privileges the vision of the "genius" male poet at the expense of female creativity.[19] As in previous sections of this thesis, this chapter aims to explore the ways in which various incarnations of Salome disrupted male-oriented models of authorship and canon formation, opening Yeats's plays up to readings that complicate our understanding of the imaginative and real places occupied by dancers' bodies in his work.

Yeats's wariness of acknowledging his debts to Wilde's *Salomé* in his dance plays has led to some critics terming his response to Wilde "indirect," alleging that he "named neither Salome nor Herodias in his work."[20] Yeats does, however, make specific reference to both of these figures in a number of creative works and letters, revealing their elasticity as metaphors in his aesthetic and spiritual systems. In *A Vision* (1925), for example, Salome is emblematic of the point just before the Christian Revelation:

> When I think of the moment before revelation I think of Salome – she too, delicately tinted or maybe mahogany dark – dancing before Herod and receiving the Prophet's head in her indifferent hands, and wonder if what seems to us decadence was not in reality the exultation of the muscular flesh and of civilization perfectly achieved.[21]

As Kermode observes, this is not the model of Salome that Yeats received from the Decadent imaginations of Huysmans or Wilde. Here, Salome symbolises a definitive "moment of cultural equilibrium [...] the great 'antithetical' phase of Christian

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[17] Doody, "'An Echo of Someone Else's Music'," 178.
[18] Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 14.
[19] Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2000), 47-49.
[20] Jones, *Literature, Modernism and Dance*, 36.
[21] W. B. Yeats, *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats*, vol. 13, *A Vision: The Original 1925 Version*, ed. Catherine E. Paul and Margaret Mills Harper (New York: Scribner, 2008), 154.

dominance, the end of the full heroic life."[22] She lacks the properties that the Symbolists suggested in the dancer – innocence, lust, cruelty, singular will – and is instead "indifferent," perhaps more reflective of the impersonal dancer Yeats celebrated in his own works, although her ecstatic, muscle-bound body is foregrounded as a source of expressive power.

It is even tempting to suggest that the "delicately tinted" images of serpentine dancers, hand-coloured by the Lumière brothers in their early film recordings, haunted Yeats's mind in this particular evocation of Salome's dance. He was certainly familiar with Loïe Fuller and her legion of imitators through his friendship with Arthur Symons, a fervent dance enthusiast who exposed him to these performances in fin-de-siècle Paris.[23] The residues of these experiences, catalogued in *The Trembling of the Veil*, emerge again in the choreographic imagery of "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen":

> When Loïe Fuller's Chinese dancers enwound
> A shining web, a floating ribbon of cloth,
> It seemed that a dragon of air
> Had fallen among dancers, had whirled them round
> Or hurried them off on its own furious path
> (*VP,* 430)

Yeats's neologism, "enwound," begins a pattern of verbal winding that continues in "web" and "whirled," repeated later in the stanza as "the Platonic Year / Whirls out new right and wrong, / Whirls in the old instead" (*VP*, 430). The motions of Fuller's veils stimulate a pattern of verbal torsion that radiates across the poem, anticipating perhaps the twisting movements of the gyres that initiate similar temporal reversals in "The Second Coming" (1921) and *A Vision*. Jones has found similar kinaesthetic patterns, prompted by the image of Fuller's undulating silks, in Mallarmé's *Un Coup de dés* (1897), where words engage "in a continuous unfolding and folding in of meaning," and she suggests that certain dance positions, such as the arabesque, provided Mallarmé with spatial and expressive models for his own poetics.[24] Certainly, the figure of the veiled dancer emerges as a crucial element of Yeats's visual scheme

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[22] Kermode, *Romantic Image*, 75.
[23] Roy Foster, *W. B. Yeats: A Life,* vol. 1*: The Apprentice Mage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 109. Yeats also wrote about "skirt dance illuminations" to Augusta Gregory. See WBY to Lady Gregory, 27 February [1908], *CL InteLex* 796.
[24] Jones, "Une écriture corporelle," 243.

in "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen," resurfacing in these portentous lines: "Herodias' daughters have returned again, / A sudden blast of dusty wind and after / Thunder of feet, tumult of images / Their purpose in the labyrinth of the wind" (*VP*, 432). The Salome conjured in these lines dances to unpredictable rhythms: her moving veils, rather than providing the dancer's balance and equilibrium, cast images into tumult, overwhelming stable meanings through the force of her gestures.

Loïe Fuller's "shining web," her luminous veils, unleash the "dragon" of movement among her group of dancers, instilling their bodies with serpentine motions that dictate the "furious path" of the poem. Long before Mallarmé, the veil was an important symbol for the Romantic poets, whose ideals, overturned in part by the tenets of Decadence and Symbolism, nonetheless reached Yeats (for whom Blake in particular was a key precursor).[25] In Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry* (posthumously published in 1840), for instance, the veil has a curious double significance as the obfuscating surface of the real that language must pierce and, conversely, as the rhetorical subtlety that gives poetry its aesthetic power – as the face of artifice, the mask, that is the lifeblood of literary creation.[26] In a suggestive comparison, Yeats declared in his essay "Prometheus Unbound" (1933) that Shelley's work was "allied to that of the [Beardsley] Salome drawings where sex is sublimated to an unearthly receptivity, though more ardent and positive, imagined under a like compulsion whatever seemed dark, destructive, indefinite."[27] A veiled dance, then, might offer an enticing paradox to a writer like Yeats, for whom it became a dominant metaphor for the difficulties of poetic labour, and for the tense accordance he sought to broach between the mind of the artist and the unified grace of his vision, which often took the form of "a perfectly proportioned human body" – that is, the body of a female dancer.[28]

"The body of a beautiful woman," Kermode acknowledges, "is a constant element in the emblematic equivalents Yeats finds for the symbol, the Romantic Image."[29] However, as the dissonant rhythms and imagery of "Nineteen Hundred

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[25] Yeats referred to Blake as his "master" and believed that Blake's "inspiration, like WBY's own, was misunderstood by the everyday philosophy of a crudely materialist world." Foster, *The Apprentice Mage*, 99.

[26] Percy Bysshe Shelley, "A Defence of Poetry," in *Romanticism: An Anthology*, ed. Duncan Wu (Chichester: Wiley, 2012), 1233-1247.

[27] W. B. Yeats, "Prometheus Unbound," in *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats*, vol. 5, *Later Essays*, ed. William H. O'Donnell (New York: Scribner, 1994), 119.

[28] Kermode, *Romantic Image*, 55.

[29] Ibid.

and Nineteen" suggest, the figure of Salome does not consistently align with a reading of the female dancer's body as a source of stable symmetries. In a letter to Nancy Maude, Yeats explicitly compared the figure of Salome to the Sidhe, the elusive spirits of Irish myth:

> The Sidhe move in dust storms & in all whirling winds. There is some connection between them & whirling movement hard to fathom. When the country people see bits of straw or dust whirling on the road they say it is "the Sidhe". In the middle ages it was said to be the dance of the daughters of Herodias – an attempt to Christianize something which was pre-christian. The Sidhe are also associated with mist & a dust storm is a kind of mist.[30]

This importantly dislodges Salome, in Yeats's mind, from a purely biblical or, indeed, Decadent context, shifting her into the realm of Irish mythology and ecology, with its nebulous "whirling movement." The serpentine "dragon of air" that uproots Fuller's dancers figuratively redirects the course of a narrative that had, until Yeats, been largely determined by the particular literary and cultural practices of nineteenth-century Symbolism, and those like Wilde who strove to imitate it.

Furthermore, Yeats's specific responses to Wilde belie his much broader interest in European Symbolism, which he also cultivated through his friendship with Symons and his interest in Maeterlinck's drama. The "dream-heavy land" and "dream-heavy hour" (*VP*, 156) of Yeats's poem "He Remembers Forgotten Beauty" (1899) conjure something of the somnambulistic conjunction of spatial and temporal frames in *Salomé*, with its lunar rituals, and also Maeterlinck's plays, where characters often seem on the cusp of paralysis as they move through their moonlit worlds. According to Michael McAteer, Yeats shares with Maeterlinck a particular use of space on stage, depicting similar states of alienation and dislocation – "a quality of estrangement that was unsettling in its time" – alongside the themes of blindness and the uncanny.[31] Indeed, the opening stage directions of Yeats's play *Deirdre* (1907) create a setting resonant of Maeterlinck's unsettling portraits of the domestic in his "plays for marionettes," such as *The Intruder* and *The Blind*. The house in *Deirdre*, which forms the locus of the play's action, is described as a place of "silence and loneliness," with unseen "curtained off" areas; the sense of blindness and exclusion compounded by the fact that "the curtains are drawn" (*CP*, 171). Yeats's play feeds on the

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[30] WBY to Nancy Maude, 20 November [1907], *CL InteLex* 701.
[31] Michael McAteer, *Yeats and European Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 39.

dislocating otherness conjured by Maeterlinck's descriptions of strange and estranged families – in his homes, communication fails and proximity is a threat.[32]

Alternately described as bloodless, dragonish, and a changeling, Deirdre is also a complex re-articulation of Salome's legacy as Yeats receives and interprets it. In June 1906, Yeats went again to see Wilde's *Salomé* in a production by Charles Ricketts – with whom Wilde had initially intended to collaborate – at the King's Hall in Covent Garden.[33] He was greatly taken with Ricketts's use of lighting and was so impressed by the actress Florence Darragh that he immediately hired her for his *Deirdre*, suggesting that he saw parallels between Wilde's tragic dancer and his own portrayal of the archetypal Irish heroine. Yeats told W. G. Fay that as soon as he "thought of [Darragh] for Deirdre [he] began to write better, [he] thought of moments of her Salome, and ventured and discovered subtleties of emotion […] never attempted before."[34] Deirdre, in Yeats's play, is aligned with Salome's dangerous femininity, suggested by her own appraisal of her precarious womanhood: "although we are so delicately made, / There's something brutal in us, and we are won / By those who can shed blood" (*CP*, 199). These lines offer a provocative take on female conquest, suggesting that the violence staked in the name of a woman reflects her own inner "brutality." As in Wilde's *Salomé*, female desire is here inevitably tangled with bloodshed, contrasted with the delicate artifice of appearances. For McAteer, *Deirdre* is "poignant and spartan," in contrast to the "lascivious and decadent" *Salomé*.[35] Yet Yeats shares with Wilde a Symbolist preoccupation with the defamiliarising qualities of ornament and artifice: Deirdre, wearing her murderous husband's rubies, is like a "glittering dragon" (*CP*, 178), anticipating the "dragon-ridden" days of "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen," with its serpentine dancers heralding the return of the daughters of Herodias. As we will see, this was a "return" that would leave its traces across Yeats's work in the decades after he saw these influential, if sceptically received, productions of *Salomé*.

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[32] McAteer has also recently compared the way Maeterlinck and Yeats use "gesture and vocal delivery for the sake of spiritual or psychic movement." See "Music, Setting, Voice: Maeterlinck's *Pelléas et Mélisande* and Yeats's *The Countess Cathleen*," *International Yeats Studies* 2, issue 1 (November 2017): Article 2.

[33] John Kelly, *A W. B. Yeats Chronology* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 106.

[34] WBY to W.G. Fay, 13 August [1906] *CL InteLex* 453.

[35] McAteer, *Yeats and European Drama*, 50.

"All things spring from movement": Yeats, Edward Gordon Craig, and Stage Choreographies

Yeats's conflicted attitude towards Wilde's *Salomé* recalls the tone of his horrified fascination at the sight of Jarry's overgrown puppet-actors in *Ubu Roi,* a work he drew on for his own play *The Green Helmet* (1910).[36] Although the plays of Wilde, Jarry, and Maeterlinck, with their radical, provocative approaches to language and performance, might seem a far cry from the Irish writer's own ideas about a national mythic drama, the theories of experimental dramatists bled into Yeats's work in unexpected ways. For Jones, Yeats's drama is undeniably innovative, anticipating the theatre of Beckett with its "self-referentiality, its scepticism about language, its modernist turn to the body."[37] Others have also asserted the radical nature of Yeats's drama, and situated Yeats at the centre, rather than the periphery, of the literature of his period. For T. S. Eliot, Yeats "was one of those few whose history is the history of their own time, who are part of the consciousness of an age that cannot be understood without them."[38] Yeats's attitudes towards dance and the status of the performing body in his dramatic system can be illuminated by exploring his collaborations with theatre practitioners and dancers. His ideas about acting, dance, and the use of space were moulded by his interest in the ideas of the writer and set designer Edward Gordon Craig, who had a crucial and lasting influence on Yeats's conception of what might constitute a modern theatre.

Yeats first became familiar with Craig's work when he attended a matinée performance of *Dido and Aeneas* by the Purcell Society in March 1901.[39] He was greatly taken with Craig's design for the production, which he described as "the only good scenery [he] ever saw," declaring in a letter to Craig that he had "created a new art."[40] For Craig, like Yeats, the body of the actor posed a problem to the fulfillment of his dramatic philosophy. Building on Jarry and Maeterlinck's experiments in puppetry, Craig's essay "The Actor and the Über-Marionette" (1907), published in his theatre journal *The Mask*, articulated his desire to have actors freed from the "bondage" of

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[36] McAteer, *Yeats and European Drama*, 6.

[37] Jones, *Literature, Modernism and Dance*, 39.

[38] T. S. Eliot, "Yeats," in *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition*, vol. 6, *The War Years: 1940-1946*, ed. David E. Chinitz and Ronald Schuchard (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2017), 87, Project MUSE.

[39] Kelly, *Yeats Chronology*, 74.

[40] WBY to Edward Gordon Craig, 2 April [1901], *CL InteLex* 32.

personality and somehow replaced by automatons.[41] The marionette seemed an attractive prospect to Craig, as it was for Wilde, because it could be manipulated to perform without the interruption of personal feeling. Yeats sympathised with this position, famously suggesting that his actors should be placed in barrels so that he could "shove them about with a pole when the action required it."[42] Aside from its mere pliability, Craig also conceived of his ideal marionette as relic from the theatre's origins in ritual: "a descendant of the stone images of the old temples – he is today a rather degenerate form of a god. […] The marionette appears to me to be the last echo of some noble and beautiful art of a past civilization."[43] Clearly, as Taxidou has demonstrated, Craig also had a strong sense of drama's ritualistic qualities, which fed into his collaborations with Yeats and their shared interest in the practices of the Japanese Nō theatre, with its celebration of masks and dances.[44]

Craig's marked interest in dance, which undoubtedly shaped his concept of the marionette-actor, developed partly as a result of his relationship with Isadora Duncan, whom he met in 1904. According to Arnold Rood, "in Craig, Duncan found the theoretic basis for her dancing, and in Duncan, Craig found the substantiation of his ideas and dreams regarding human movement."[45] This reading, falling into familiar claims about the gendered division of mind and body, does not fully account for the sophisticated theories Duncan herself developed about dance, which have been explored in a number of recent studies. Carrie Preston, for instance, has shown how Duncan both imagined and performed a relationship between her choreographies and her personal feminist politics, departing from the ideology of the suffragettes but posing an alternative construction of creative individualism that married her apparently "antimodern spiritualism" with "dances seeming so fluid and continuous that they appeared to be the spontaneous movements of a body propelled by a motor."[46] Yeats shared with Duncan, Ellis claims, a sense of dance and dancer as "an indivisible unit of form and signification," but Duncan's performances may also have

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[41] Edward Gordon Craig, "The Actor and the Über-Marionette," in *Craig on Theatre*, 84.
[42] Yeats, quoted in Taxidou, *Modernism and Performance*, 82.
[43] Craig, *Craig On Theatre*, 86.
[44] Taxidou, *Modernism and Performance*, 22-33.
[45] Arnold Rood, introduction to *Craig on Movement and Dance,* by Edward Gordon Craig (New York: Dance Horizons, 1977), xiii-xiv.
[46] Preston, *Modernism's Mythic Pose*, 188; 190. See also Roger Copeland, "Dance, Feminism and the Critique of the Visual," in *Dance, Gender and Culture*, ed. Helen Thomas (London: Macmillan Press, 1993), 139-150; Ann Daly, "Dance History and Feminist Theory: Reconsidering Isadora Duncan and the Male Gaze," in *Gender in Performance: The Presentation of Difference in the Performing Arts*, ed. Laurence Senelick (Hanover; London: University Press of New England, 1993), 239-59.

provided Yeats and Craig with a suggestive visual embodiment of woman as an autonomous machine.[47]

Duncan's apparent spontaneity of movement and her deep interest in Hellenic motifs and poses showed her absorption of European theories of movement not often incorporated into traditional ballet; for example, the writings of Delsarte.[48] Although she saw performances of Wilde's *Salomé*, unlike many modern dancers Duncan did not dance specifically as Salome; indeed, in her autobiography, she explicitly distanced herself from the reputation of this figure:

> But at least I was not Salome. I wanted the head of no one: I was never a Vampire, but always an Inspirational. If you refused me "your lips, Johannes," and your love, I had the intelligent grace of "Young America" to wish you Godspeed on your journey of virtue.[49]

Duncan was eager to differentiate her own metaphysical and classical conceptions of dance from the vampiric, decadent legacies she associated with Salome, as her paraphrasing of Wilde suggests. Following this passage in her autobiography, she also proceeds to define her own "American" values against what she perceives to be Salome's libidinous orientalism. Duncan's use of veils as a central element of her dance practice did, however, suggest visual resonances with this figure and with other modern dance pioneers, such as her one-time mentor Loïe Fuller, who choreographed Salome dances that similarly celebrated the creative individualism of the female artist. Recalling the first time he watched Duncan perform, Craig wrote: "she was speaking in her own language, not echoing any ballet master, and so she came to move as no one had ever seen anyone move before."[50] It is telling that Craig here describes Duncan's choreography in terms of "language," retroactively turning her performance into a grammar and syntax of movement – something visually inscribed by the body like Mallarmé's "corporeal writing." As Taxidou observes, "the concept of rhythm becomes a key trope that brings together and helps bridge the binaries between textuality and embodiment, viewing *both* 'the flesh as word' *and* 'the word as flesh'."[51] By reading Duncan's dancing body as a textual form, and the theatre

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[47] Ellis, *The Plays of W. B. Yeats*, 196.
[48] Ibid. Yeats saw Duncan's *Dance Idylls* on 16 March 1900. See Kelly, *Yeats Chronology*, 65.
[49] Isadora Duncan, *My Life* (New York: Liveright Publishing, 2013), 192.
[50] Edward Gordon Craig, quoted in *Craig on Movement and Dance*, xiv.
[51] Olga Taxidou, "'Do not call me a dancer': Dance and Modernist Experimentation," in *Moving Modernisms*, 122.

in turn as a kind of body, Craig aligns Duncan's performance with the more overtly textual demands of the literary theatre, to which he would turn his attention in a series of polemics on theatrical reform. In these pieces, Craig also draws on the language of movement he had observed in Duncan's dances to articulate his vision for a revived English stage.

Craig's essay "The Artists of the Theatre of the Future" (1908) imagined an ideal artist who would bring to the theatre "noble artificiality" and "beauty," which he described as "something which has the most balance about it, the *justest* thing."[52] For Craig, beauty is dynamic and embodied, figured in terms of how it might display "balance," which accords with his sense that movement is the underlying principle of the stage: "all things spring from movement, even music; […] it is our supreme honour to be the ministers to the supreme force. . . Movement."[53] Reformulating Pater's dictum that "all art constantly aspires towards the condition of music,"[54] Craig announces "movement" as the physical, spiritual force from which all things emerge. Moreover, he declares it the mission of the theatrical artist to understand and demonstrate the capacities of this energy, much as a dancer like Duncan masters and embodies kinetic power. The Craig of this article partly anticipates the theories of Germaine Dulac, who applied these principles to her cinematography, celebrating dancers – Loïe Fuller in particular – as glorious exponents of pure movement. Craig's concept of a mobile, transformative theatre space, choreographed by an ideal dramaturg, also applies to the sphere of drama the principles of (spontaneous yet articulate) motion he saw in Duncan's dancing.

Real dancers, however, sometimes fell short of Craig's ideal image of the performer and he penned a series of articles attacking the Ballets Russes in *The Mask*. In an article extravagantly titled "Kleptomania, or the Russian Ballet," Craig, under the pseudonym John Balance, accused Diaghilev of "[stealing] an idea or two from the only original dancer of the age, the American, and another idea or two from the most advanced scene designers of Europe."[55] He obviously considered himself one of the victims of this plagiarism, and was equally outraged by what he saw as the Russian Ballet's shameless imitation of Isadora Duncan's style. This was, however,

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[52] Craig, "The Artists of the Theatre of the Future," in *Craig on Movement*, 28.
[53] Ibid., 33.
[54] Walter Pater, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, ed. Matthew Beaumont (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) 124.
[55] Craig, "Kleptomania, or the Russian Ballet," in *Craig on Movement*, 81.

symptomatic of the uneasiness Craig often experienced in personal relationships with dancers. Despite his effusive response to Duncan's dancing, he suggested at points during their relationship that she should give it up to support him in his own career.[56] His relationships with Diaghilev and Nijinsky also tell of personal awkwardness and missed opportunities. Although his essays declare otherwise, Craig was undeniably intrigued by the Ballets Russes, and there were even plans for him to collaborate with the group on a ballet of *Cupid and Psyche*, with Craig in charge of "staging" and Vaughan Williams as composer.[57] Quite why this ballet fell apart is unclear, although Roger Savage has suggested that perhaps Craig assumed responsibilities as choreographer as well, and the plans he showed Diaghilev were deemed "too daring" even for the Ballets Russes.[58]

Yeats, on the other hand, was fascinated by the Ballets Russes performances he witnessed in May 1911, which inspired him to compose a lyric for his *Countess Cathleen*. He saw them again with Charles Ricketts in March 1913 and once more found them "exquisite."[59] As Ellis has shown, Yeats understood the contribution made by Diaghilev's company to modern conceptions of art and performance, and he alluded to their innovations in his essay "A People's Theatre – a letter to Lady Gregory" (1919).[60] It was through working with Craig's screens in particular that he discovered a means of incorporating such choreographic forms into his work for the stage. Yeats felt that Craig's work in stage design was "a perfect fulfilment of the ideal [he] had always had," and he worked closely with Craig on designs for the production of his own plays. [61] Yeats's plans for a reformation of the theatre in Ireland were guided, according to Mary Fleischer, by his "interest in experimenting with patterns and rhythms inherent in the theatre's constituent media," which brought drama back to its "origins in ritual and spiritual experience."[62] Like Craig, Yeats published

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[56] Renée Vincent, "The Influences of Isadora Duncan on the Designs of Edward Gordon Craig," *Theatre Design and Technology* 34 (Winter, 1998): 37-48.

[57] Craig issued a cryptic denial of the project in 1913: see Craig, "Editorial Note. The Russian Ballet," in *Craig on Movement*, 102.

[58] Roger Savage, *Masques, Mayings, and Music-Dramas* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2014), 211. See also Karen Dorn, "Dialogue into Movement: W. B. Yeats's Theatre Collaboration with Gordon Craig," in *Yeats and the Theatre,* ed. Robert O' Driscoll and Lorna Reynolds (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1975), 109-136.

[59] Kelly, *Yeats Chronology*, 149; 162.

[60] Ellis, *The Plays of W. B. Yeats*, 203.

[61] WBY to Lady Gregory, 3 April [1901], *CL InteLex* 32.

[62] Mary Fleischer, *Embodied Texts: Symbolist Playwright-Dancer Collaborations* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), 152.

regularly on this subject in *The Mask*, writing about the value of Craig's screens to his own dramatic method in his essay "The Tragic Theatre" (1910):

> All summer I have been playing with a little model, where there is a scene capable of endless transformation, of the expression of every mood that does not require a photographic reality. Mr. Craig, who has invented all this, has permitted me to set up upon the stage of the Abbey another scene that corresponds in the scale of a foot for an inch. […] He has banished a whole world that wearied me and was undignified and given me forms and lights upon which I can play as upon a stringed instrument.[63]

Echoing Craig's comparison of music and movement, Yeats describes the screens in terms that emphasise their portable, malleable nature. Indeed, Yeats opined to Lady Gregory; "rapidity of change is one of [the invention's] chief merits."[64] Disregarding the conventional limits of the static backdrop, these screens become part of the rhetoric of movement Craig and Yeats describe as essential to a modern theatre, seemingly derived from the grammar of motion elaborated by Isadora Duncan before their eyes.

In this vein, James Flannery has argued that Craig's screens reflect his fascination with the body of the dancer, realising in object form the flexible materialism he glimpsed in Duncan's performances.

> No longer would scenery be a mere background to the stage action. By becoming three-dimensional, as flexible, and as interesting in itself as the body of a trained dancer, and by changing shape before the eyes of the audience, it would provide a new kind of theatrical experience.[65]

Craig's designs enabled spatial choreographies that not only influenced Yeats's ideas about staging possibilities for his plays, but also encouraged him to rethink his approach to dramatic language. Yeats revised *The Land of Heart's Desire*, *The Countess Cathleen*, and *The Hour Glass* in light of his work with Craig, staging them with the new scenery in 1911 and then rewriting his texts, in Karen Dorn's words, through "a language that not only acts with the stage space, but grows from the movement within

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[63] Yeats, "Appendix G: Conclusion to 'The Tragic Theatre' in *Plays for an Irish Theatre* (1911)," in *Essays and Introductions*, ed. George Bornstein and Richard J. Finneran vol. 4 of *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats* (New York: Scribner, 2007), 315.
[64] WBY to Lady Gregory, 31 December [1909], *CL InteLex* 1255.
[65] James Flannery, "W. B. Yeats, Gordon Craig, and the Visual Art of the Theatre," in *Yeats and the Theatre,* 94.

it."[66] Yeats's approach to these screens – as examples of a theatrical ideal predicated on continuous motion – reflect Bergson's emphasis on the unfixable nature of form, which is only ever "*a snapshot view of a transition.*"[67]

Craig's screens allowed Yeats to experiment first-hand with the physical space of the theatre – a role that might otherwise have been left to set designers. In 1910, he repeated to Lady Gregory how "exciting and exhausting" he found the work: "a couple of hours work with it getting lighting & forms so that the picture is beautiful leave me worn out."[68] Working with the screens encouraged Yeats to think seriously about the role of light in the theatre, and how it might fit into the themes of his drama. He became convinced, in terms reminiscent of Loïe Fuller, that the key to discovering "the beauty of the moving figure" was in the dance of light in space, and he declared, "we should begin our reform by […] clearing from round the stage and above the stage everything that prevents the free playing of light."[69] Interestingly, by late 1911 his work with the screens had evolved to incorporate other technologies. As he detailed in another letter: "Monday I spent in the Theatre […] showing the Craig screens. We had a man with a magic lantern & made all sorts of experiments."[70] Magic lanterns had long been used in all kinds of entertainment forms, and, as discussed in previous chapters, Fuller was one of a number of dancers to use them in her performances, projecting images onto her veiled body. Yeats's enthusiasm for the lanterns and their ability to make "beautiful little landscapes on the screens" shows how his thinking about stagecraft evolved from the static to the mobile, fuelled by Craig's choreographic theories of dramatic representation and action.[71]

Directed by Craig's contention that "all things spring from movement," a language of gesture, rhythm, and mobility came to dominate Yeats's conception of the theatre. Yet Craig's input, essential as it proved, was just one aspect of Yeats's evolving practice during this period. The "movement" that remained figurative in Craig's writings, and material in his screens, found its embodied expression in the dancers who performed in Yeats's plays. Real dancers, who so often collided with the "ideal" image held by artists of the period – Mallarmé, Symons, Craig –, haunted

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[66] Karen Dorn, *Players and Painted Stage: The Theatre of W. B. Yeats* (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1984), 20.

[67] Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 319.

[68] WBY to Lady Gregory, 4 & 6 February [1910], *CL InteLex* 1288; 1290.

[69] WBY to Unidentified Correspondent, 8 June [1910], *CL InteLex* 1366.

[70] WBY to Lady Gregory, 20 December [1911], *CL InteLex* 1786.

[71] Ibid.

Yeats's imagination and perforated the form of his plays, as his collaborations with Michio Ito and Ninette de Valois suggest. These performers did as much as Craig, perhaps more, to shape Yeats's ideas about how movement might be incorporated into poetic drama; and, inversely, how poetic drama might emerge from the principles of movement. His plays reveal the growing influence of dance on his vision for the theatre and, furthermore, they frequently evoke the veiled dance of Salome, transferring the hallucinatory oriental symbolism of Wilde's play to the Irish mythical context that Yeats favoured.

"From behind a veil": Michio Ito and *At the Hawk's Well*

In the introduction to *Certain Noble Plays of Japan* (1916), Ezra Pound's translation of Ernest Fenollosa's Nō manuscripts, Yeats announced that he had "written a little play that can be played in a room for so little money that forty or fifty readers of poetry can pay the price."[72] The play in question was *At the Hawk's Well*, the first of Yeats's plays for dancers, which was performed to a select audience in Lady Cunard's drawing room on 2 April 1916. For Yeats, the Nō texts were relics of an ancient, austere, and mystical theatre – from them, he created his own "form of drama, distinguished, indirect and symbolic."[73] As his introduction makes clear, the prominence of dance was one of the elements of the Nō he found most alluring, although in the Pound drafts he read, this dance remained, of course, merely abstract. It was upon the arrival of a real dancer, Michio Ito, that *At the Hawk's Well* began to take shape as performed material, as Yeats himself acknowledged:

> My play is made possible by a Japanese dancer whom I have seen dance in a studio and in a drawing-room and on a very small stage lit by an excellent stage-light. In the studio and in the drawing-room alone where the lighting was the light we are most accustomed to, did I see him as the tragic image that has stirred my imagination. There where no studied lighting, no stage picture made an artificial world, he was able, as he rose from the floor, where he had been sitting cross-legged or as he threw out an arm, to recede from us into some more powerful life.[74]

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[72] Yeats, *Certain Noble Plays of Japan*, in *Essays and Introductions*, 163.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid., 165.

For Yeats, the power of Ito's effect lies in the way he "recedes" from the spectator – a quality of estrangement that takes the dancer, paradoxically, into "the deeps of the mind." Yeats discovers that this "separating…intimacy" is enhanced, even created by the minimalist setting – the natural light and the familiar interior – to which he is accustomed, but which becomes strange as Ito's dance begins. For Yeats, this art of the imagination retains its distance from worldly things, and all aspects of the performance "help in keeping the door," resonant perhaps of Maeterlinck's tightly choreographed plays.[75] Intriguingly, Yeats describes his experience of the modern theatre until this point as reaching him "from behind a veil," suggesting that Ito's dancing body has clarified and unveiled previously obscure images and sensations.[76] Lifting this veil between the dancer and the spectator, Ito becomes a Salome figure, conjuring a dance that is at once alien and intimate.

For Yeats, the veil was an influential metaphor for the sometimes opaque relation between the world and the vision of the artist; as he wrote in a letter to Horace Reynolds: "All one's life one struggles towards reality, finding always but new veils."[77] The interplays between Salome's veiled dance and Yeats's response to Michio Ito can be traced through the choreographic imagery and language of *At the Hawk's Well*, which also drew on the tropes of the Nō theatre. Following Richard Taylor's pioneering study *The Drama of W. B. Yeats: Irish Myth and the Japanese Nō,* most scholars have attributed Yeats's knowledge of the Nō to Pound's translations of Fenollosa. [78] However, Edward Marx has shown that it was more likely the Japanese poet Yone Noguchi who encouraged Yeats to familiarise himself with the Nō as early as 1907, which coincided with the production of *Deirdre*, a play also steeped in the legacy of Salome and Symbolism, as we have seen.[79] Dance operates as the central motif and driving force of the Nō theatre. According to Okifumi Komesu, the plot of the play is usually basic and subsidiary, "serving only to bring out in the forms of dance the affliction and mortification" of the spectral protagonist.[80] Undoubtedly, this principle had a major influence on Yeats's plays for dancers, although his work had revealed a prominent fascination for dance well before the composition of *At the Hawk's Well.*

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[75] Yeats, *Certain Noble Plays of Japan*, 165.
[76] Ibid., 164.
[77] WBY to Horace Reynolds, 24 December [1932], *CL InteLex* 5799.
[78] Richard Taylor, *The Drama of W. B. Yeats: Irish Myth and the Japanese Nō* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1976).
[79] Edward Marx, "No Dancing: Yone Noguchi in Yeats's Japan," *Yeats Annual* 17 (2007): 51-94.
[80] Okifumi Komesu, "*At the Hawk's Well* and *Taka No Izumi* in a Creative Circle," *Yeats Annual* 5 (1987): 103.

For instance, dance is a crucial structural and symbolic device in *The Land of Heart's Desire* (1894), and throughout the early poetry. It is in *At the Hawk's Well*, however, that Yeats aligns his interest in the Nō with his enthusiasm for dance practices, given life in this case by Ito.

The legacies of Craig's screen choreographies are integral to the structures of both text and performance in *At the Hawk's Well*. Along with the "patterned screen" that frames the action, Yeats introduces props that perform a similar function in terms of suggesting meaning through movement. The First Musician carries "a folded black cloth" onto the stage with him, and when the three musicians begin to sing the first lines of the verse, they perform a ritual with the cloth:

> As they unfold the cloth, they go backward a little so that the stretched cloth and the wall make a triangle with the First Musician at the apex supporting the centre of the cloth. On the black cloth is a gold pattern suggesting a hawk. The Second and Third Musicians now slowly fold up the cloth again, pacing with a rhythmic movement of the arms towards the First Musician and singing. (*CP*, 208)

This cloth is an idea imported from the Nō theatre, and Liam Miller interprets it as a device Yeats appropriates from his Japanese model in order to "[create] a ritual uniquely suited to his own form of drama."[81] Like Craig's mobile screens, however, this cloth performs its suggestive purpose through a language of choreographed movement. The actors' repeated gestures of folding and unfolding mimic the patterns of veiling central to Salome's dance, which depends upon the symbolic manipulation of the dancer's garments, also a central element of Fuller's serpentine dance. As the musicians handle the cloth, it is transformed from a prop into a symbol, revealing the avian image and foregrounding the later dance of the Guardian, performed in the manner of a hawk, in the drama's visual register. In this way, Yeats creates a theatrical counterpart to Fuller's "shining web," similarly highlighting the function of the cloth or the veil as a manipulable surface that reveals its symbols through the art of motion. Importantly, the actors' bodies are part of this ritualistic performance: they pace the stage "with a rhythmic movement" approaching the conditions of dance and underlining Yeats's interest in the relationship between moving bodies and veils.

Recalling Craig's celebration of the Über-Marionette, the rhetoric of movement Yeats develops in *At the Hawk's Well* emphasises automatic, mechanical

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[81] Liam Miller, *The Noble Drama of W. B. Yeats* (Dublin: The Dolmen Press, 1977), 220.

forms of motion. According to Yeats, the Nō plays were written for "those movements of the body copied from the marionette shows of the 14ᵗʰ century," which naturally bore a new relevance to his vision of the modern theatre in the wake of Craig's theories.[82] The Old Man who lingers by the site of a dry well fabled to produce "miraculous water" treads the stage with precisely this gait: "His movements, like those of the other persons of the play, suggest a marionette" (*CP,* 210). Dance also underpins the play's mythical narrative, which revolves around this hollow well and "the holy shades / That dance upon the desolate mountain" (*CP,* 213), who are closely aligned with the Sidhe and, by association, with the dancing daughters of Herodias. At the mercy of the Sidhe, who control this strange and sacred region, the Old Man has spent a lifetime waiting for the well to fill. He tells the Young Man, the Irish legendary hero Cuchulain: "This place / Belongs to me, that girl there, and those others, / Deceivers of men" (*CP,* 213). When Cuchulain asks why he "rail[s] / Upon those dancers that all others bless," the Old Man replies that he is "one whom the dancers cheat" (*CP,* 213). In this play, the Sidhe are formless, linked to the spectral dancers of the Nō, with their leader emerging as "the unappeasable shadow," who is "always flitting upon this mountain side/ To allure or destroy" (*CP,* 214).

The action of "flitting" conveys a ghostly lightness secured by the fact that the Sidhe never appear upon the stage, instead transmitting their strange energies through the (female) body of the Guardian of the Well, played by Ito in 1916 and by Ninette de Valois in the 1933 revival at the Abbey. Yeats's representation of the Sidhe, connected in his mind to the tumult of images precipitated by Salome's return, corresponds with his other accounts of the metamorphosing creatures of Irish folklore, such as the Pooka, the "wild staring phantom" that "has many shapes" and is "only half in the world of form."[83] In *At the Hawk's Well*, the Guardian's Hawk dance is presented as the violent energy of unearthly spirits, who inhabit her body for the brief period of the performance. Within the play, the dancer's creative role therefore appears compromised by the disembodied rhythms of the dance, which derive from a remote and unpredictable external source. However, this effacement of the Guardian's creative input is superseded by the work of the real performer, Ito, who choreographed the dance that was supposed to "possess" him. For Yeats, Ito

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[82] Yeats, *Certain Noble Plays of Japan*, vii.
[83] W. B. Yeats, "Introduction and Headnotes to *Fairy and Folktales of the Irish Peasantry*," in *Prefaces and Introductions,* ed. William H. O'Donnell, vol. 6 of *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats,* ed. William H. O'Donnell (New York: Macmillan, 1989), 15-16.

represented the ideal dancer – "the tragic image" – but he was also a trained professional whose choreography shaped the course of the text. Curtis Bradford has shown how the revisions of *At the Hawk's Well* reveal the emerging centrality of the dance to the performance, since Yeats cut portions of text he felt Ito's body already expressed perfectly well.[84] Indeed, in the very early stages of the play's composition, Yeats told John Quinn that he was crafting the text around his central performer, rather than subsuming the dancer within his symbolic vision: "I am writing a little play which is to be a setting for a dance by Itow [sic], a Japanese dancer."[85]

The importance of Ito's choreographic knowledge to *At the Hawk's Well* is suggested by the disjuncture between his background and the mystical opinion Yeats held of him. Although Yeats closely associated Ito with the Nō, Ito had no particular qualifications in this tradition.[86] He had been trained in Kabuki, a form of Japanese drama that blends music and dance, and bears perhaps a stronger comparison to Western stage arts than the Nō.[87] He had also spent two years at Dalcroze's school of eurhythmics in Hellerau, where he was exposed to the ideas and designs of theatre practitioner Adolphe Appia, and began to devise his own choreographic techniques, which drew on these Japanese and European educations.[88] Moreover, Ito was fascinated by Ancient Egyptian art, and took inspiration from both Nijinsky and Isadora Duncan, whom he had seen dance in Paris and Germany respectively.[89] Although it may be no surprise that Yeats sensed in Ito a performer who could incorporate modern styles into the "ancient salt" of myth, Ito's choreographic knowledge exceeded what Yeats imagined to be an exclusively Japanese tradition based on nostalgia for antiquarian models.[90]

Ito's training, and his exposure to the kinds of articulated, staccato gestures Nijinsky devised for *Le Sacre du Printemps* (1913), suggest that the rhetoric of movement developed in *At the Hawk's Well* may have been driven by his own choreographic interests, as well as the lingering influence of Craig. Ito's students have

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[84] Curtis Bradford, *Yeats at Work* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1965), 174-216.
[85] WBY to John Quinn, 4 February [1916], *CL InteLex* 2852.
[86] Fleischer, *Embodied Texts*, 183.
[87] Miller, *The Noble Drama*, 195.
[88] Fleischer, *Embodied Texts*, 169.
[89] Ibid., 167.
[90] Yeats used this metaphor to delineate his poetics in relation to traditional forms: "Ancient salt is best packing"; W. B. Yeats, "A General Introduction for My Work," in *Essays and Introductions,* vol. 5 of *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats*, ed. William O'Donnell (New York: Scribner, 1994), 213. Armstrong takes this image as a basis for interrogating Yeats's use of tradition as a "framing container" for his literary experiments; see Armstrong, *Reframing Yeats,* 2.

recorded how he taught them to dance like marionettes, imagining strings attached to their fingers, and he later became famous in the US for his short solo dance: *Pizzicati* or *Marionette Dance*.[91] Furthermore, Kevin Riordan points to a filmic quality in the choreography produced by the collaboration between Ito and Yeats, observing, "in the spirit of the period's developing cinematic imagination, both Ito and Yeats believed performance to be the movement among discrete stills or poses."[92] When Ito performed his *Marionette Dance* at the Rose Bowl in 1929, he had his body illuminated from below so that his shadow loomed behind him on a large screen, "emphasis[ing] the dancer's body as manipulable stage material" and giving the live performance the kind of cinematic textures invoked by Fuller with her luminous veils decades earlier.[93]

Whether or not Ito had his work with Yeats in mind at this point, his shadow screen performance harks back to the choreographic experiments with space and design that defined the 1916 production of *At the Hawk's Well*. Yeats's own limited knowledge of dance practice did not preclude his fascination with dance as an idea. Yet during their translation into performance texts, these ideas were often reshaped by Yeats's interactions with trained professionals. His understanding of the Nō, for instance, received second-hand through Pound, took on an entirely new character in Ito, whose "Nō-inspired" performances were in fact choreographies derived from his background in Kabuki and Dalcrozean pedagogy.[94] Unfortunately for Yeats, Ito left for the United States in December 1916 and did not return again to work on the dance-dramas. After his departure, it would be a long period of time until Yeats found another performer to enhance and direct his vision for the dancing body.

"Mingling of Contraries": Dance at the Abbey Theatre

This performer would be the Irish dancer Ninette de Valois, whom Yeats met at Cambridge's Festival Theatre in May 1927.[95] They spoke over breakfast on a Sunday morning. Yeats held her interest with talk of his dance-dramas and promised her

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[91] Carrie Preston, "Modernism's Dancing Marionettes: Oskar Schlemmer, Michel Fokine, and Ito Michio," *Modernist Cultures* 9 (2014): 127.

[92] Kevin Riordan, "Italic Choreography in the Dance Plays of W. B. Yeats," *Theatre Annual* 64 (2011): n.60.

[93] Preston, "Modernism's Dancing Marionettes," 129.

[94] Fleischer, *Embodied Texts,* 182.

[95] Richard Allen Cave, *Collaborations: Ninette de Valois and William Butler Yeats* (Alton: Dance Books Ltd., 2011), 5.

practical experience in managing an artistic company, proposing that de Valois come to the Abbey Theatre in order to establish a School of Ballet. As de Valois records of the meeting:

> I would visit Dublin every three months and produce his Plays for Dancers and perform in them myself; thus, he said the poetic drama of Ireland would live again and take its rightful place in the Nation's own Theatre, and the oblivion imposed on it by the popularity of peasant drama would become a thing of the past.[96]

For de Valois, who would go on to found the Royal Ballet, the prospect of working with the creative contingent at the Abbey Theatre was exhilarating: "I would work among those people whose efforts to establish the Irish Theatre were in progress at the time that I struggled with an Irish jig in a farmhouse at the foot of the Wicklow Hills."[97] If a nostalgic de Valois was invigorated by the opportunity to align her expertise with the vision of Ireland's national theatre, Yeats was eager to find a dancer who, like Michio Ito, could help him to hone and develop the choreographic elements of his plays. He had been dissatisfied with the amateur dancing in the 1926 double bill of *The Only Jealousy of Emer* and *The Cat and the Moon* and he understood the credibility that a trained professional like de Valois, a pupil of Enrico Cecchetti and former member of the Ballets Russes, could bring to the realisation of his dramatic concepts.[98]

As de Valois's recollections of her move to the Abbey suggest, her decision to work with Yeats was coloured by her fondness of the familiar rhythms of Irish theatre and culture, perhaps a consequence of those years spent touring Europe with Diaghilev's company – a period of "revelation" but also rootless mobility.[99] "The Irish," de Valois writes in her autobiography; "are natural actors," with a wonderful "sense of timing and interplay," and an intuitive understanding of the musicality of language: "they can all intone; with them the 'keen' becomes a strange chant."[100] Her description, emerging from a certain strain of Celtic romanticism, resonates with Yeats's own desire to resurrect the bardic arts, an ambition grounded in his vision of a culturally authentic theatre that would see "the living voices of a chanting tradition

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[96] Ninette de Valois, *Come Dance With Me: A Memoir, 1898-1956* (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 1992), 88.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Cave, *Collaborations*, 4-5.
[99] De Valois, *Come Dance With Me*,
[100] Ibid., 89.

that had retreated into solitary walkways and private quarters [brought] back into the public realm."[101] As Ronald Schuchard has shown, Yeats's longstanding interest in bardic chanting was connected to dance through the activities of his collaborator Florence Farr, whose group "The Dancers" was inspired partly by her interpretations of Nietzsche's celebration of dance in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.[102] Despite her very rigorous classical training, de Valois was also intrigued by the ancient connections between dance and dramatic action, which left her well placed to engage with the rhythms Yeats sought to create through the interplays between poetic declamation and gesture on stage.

In a 1926 production of the *Oresteia* at Terence Gray's Festival Theatre, de Valois had experimented with choreographing the movements of the Greek chorus, suggesting that she was deeply interested in the dramatic possibilities of dance beyond the stricter demands of the ballet.[103] It was also at the Festival Theatre that Yeats saw her dance the lead role in his *The Player Queen*, encouraging him to approach her the next day. Terence Gray, a cousin of de Valois and fervent disciple of German Expressionism, had turned the Festival Theatre into a hive of avant-garde innovation, moving firmly away from the tenets of realism and Naturalism, which he abhorred. Indeed, the stage at the Festival Theatre, devoid of a proscenium arch and characterised by a large central staircase that connected the audience to the actors, was "so designed that conventional realistic production was almost impossible."[104] Gray's aesthetic commitments certainly piqued Yeats's curiosity, and he was fascinated by the performance he witnessed of his own work. He wrote of de Valois's "inventive genius" to his wife the next morning,[105] and used his meeting with the dancer as an opportunity to net her talent for his own use at the Abbey.

De Valois's immersion in Gray's experimental theatre practices, and her apparent suitability for the portentous ritualism of Yeatsian dance-dramas, also connected her to the figure of Salome. Working alongside de Valois in 1929, Gray staged Wilde's *Salomé* at the Festival Theatre, an ambitious production he repeated in 1931, with de Valois choreographing the dance of the seven veils on both occasions. In Gray's opinion, the "dramatic value" of Wilde's play was realised through an

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[101] Ronald Schuchard, *The Last Minstrels: Yeats and the Revival of the Bardic Arts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), xxi.
[102] Ibid., 151-156.
[103] De Valois, *Come Dance With Me*, 87.
[104] Norman Marshall, *The Other Theatre* (London: John Lehman, 1947), 54.
[105] WBY to George Yeats, 23 May [1927], *CL InteLex* 4999.

emphasis on "stylisation, artifice, rhythmic structure, musical repetition and 'expressionist' methods," aligning Wilde's Symbolist text with the forms of the "Greek chorus […] unsullied by Realism or Romanticism."[106] As Tydeman and Price have shown, the design for this production brilliantly conferred these artificial effects: a "massive, stylised […] staircase" topped with three irregular thrones, and "huge cylindrical columns" created an imposing display of "abstract power" not confined to any particular historical setting.[107] This abstract design, with its elaborate variety of lines, angles, and shapes, made the stage itself a site in which objects and space were carefully choreographed, echoing Craig's theories of dramatic movement, which had such a profound influence on Yeats. Indeed, the daunting columns that feature in Gray's production of *Salomé* reflect the starkly rendered pillars that dominate the stage in Craig's model for a 1912 production of *Hamlet*, and many of his other sketches that similarly played with height and proportion through such structures.[108]

Furthermore, Gray shared Craig's deep preoccupation with the nature of movement, and declared that "it is only in movement, by the manipulation of the whole human body animated by the whole human soul that such extreme depths of feeling can be conveyed." In this sense, he understood dance in "broad" terms as "includ[ing] any sort of studied movement, and, more particularly, studied immobility."[109] It was the "studied immobility" of mythic posing that influenced Isadora Duncan, and Yeats, too, believed "the nobleness of art" to be in "the mingling of contraries, […] overflowing turbulent energy *and* marmorean stillness."[110] This productive, febrile tension between motion and inertia, also central to the gestural economy of Maeterlinck's "static theatre," came to shape Yeats's (and later Beckett's) approach to the language of the stage, a grammar of movement that revolved around the modes of dance.

It was to Salome's dance in particular that de Valois returned. Along with choreographing the dances for Vivienne Bennett and Beatrix Lehmann in the two Festival Theatre productions of *Salomé*, de Valois also devised a dance of the seven

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[106] Terence Gray, quoted in Tydeman and Price, *Wilde: Salome*, 88-89.
[107] Ibid., 89.
[108] Janet Leeper, *Edward Gordon Craig: Designs for the Theatre* (London: Penguin, 1948), 25. See also the 3D digital reconstructions of Yeats and Craig's designs for productions at the Abbey, produced by researchers at Trinity College Dublin: http://craigscreens.blog.oldabbeytheatre.net/?page_id=298.
[109] Gray, quoted in Cave, *Collaborations*, 13.
[110] W. B. Yeats, "Poetry and Tradition," in *Early Essays,* 186 [My emphasis]. Michael North discusses these lines in his essay, "The Ambiguity of Repose: Sculpture and the Public Art of W. B. Yeats," *ELH* 50 (1983): 379.

veils for Margaret Rawlings, who played the lead role in Peter Godfrey's 1931 staging of Wilde's play at the Gate Theatre Studio in London.[111] Intriguingly, the veils in this production were not wrapped around the dancer's body but arranged across the stage, "withdrawn one by one to discover the rhythmically moving limbs of Salome," integrating the stage space into the choreography in a manner most recently seen in Yaël Farber's *Salome* (2017).[112] One bewildered commentator, while commending Rawlings's spirit, was unconvinced by the dance's erotic promise, suggesting that the performance "seemed of a nature to warm a professor of calisthenics rather than to convulse an unholy hedonist."[113] This critique may signal de Valois's departure from some of the more voyeuristic elements of the dance, since the writer associates Rawlings's body with the exercises of rhythmic gymnastics rather than with a striptease. The former was a common feature of twentieth-century women's health movements and of Dalcroze's "eurhythmics," a practice scathingly parodied by Beckett in his novel *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (1932).[114]

De Valois's collaborations with these Salome dancers left their mark. Many years later, she recalled Margaret Rawlings's impressive choreographic instincts during their work on *Salomé*: "I know no actress with a greater sense of natural movement than hers."[115] Vivienne Bennett, whose dance of the seven veils de Valois arranged, was a colleague at the Abbey Theatre and oversaw the opening of the School of Ballet.[116] It is striking that de Valois's work with this circle of Salome performers should align with the period of her involvement at the Abbey Theatre. As we shall see, it was in the years following de Valois's Salome choreographies that Yeats's plays became even more conspicuously laden with Wildean echoes, turning repeatedly to the well-worn symbols of the dance and the severed head. Moreover, it is clear that de Valois's presence at the Abbey gave Yeats cause to rethink the choreographic elements of his dance-dramas. In a letter of June 1928, he disclosed that he had been revising *The Only Jealousy of Emer*, producing a work that was "less poetical and much stronger than the old, with opportunities in it for dancing." Ninette de Valois, he revealed, "has seen the scenario and made suggestions about the

[111] Tydeman and Price, *Wilde: Salome*, 91.
[112] Reviewer quoted in Ibid., 92. For discussion of Farber, see the conclusion.
[113] H.H. "Gale. Salome," *The Observer*, May 31, 1931, ProQuest.
[114] See Robin Veder, "The Expressive Efficacies of American Delsarte and Mensendieck Body Culture," *Modernism/ modernity* 17 (2010): 819-838; Samuel Beckett, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1992), 13-14.
[115] De Valois, *Come Dance with Me*, 98.
[116] Victoria O' Brien, *A History of Irish Ballet: 1927-1963* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2011), 11.

arrangement for the dances."[117] De Valois herself recalls that the role of the Woman of the Sidhe, a Salomean figure for Yeats, was altered so that she could interpret it as a masked "dance mime."[118] Yeats's and de Valois's relationship was evidently of a collaborative nature, with de Valois using her knowledge to shape the course of both text and performance as Yeats continued to think of his plays as revolving around a language of movement.

As Yeats had intended, de Valois's broader activities at the Abbey School of Ballet had a profound effect on the development of dance in Ireland. Many of the Abbey Theatre programmes between 1928 and 1934 list ballet school performances alongside the main theatrical productions. A performance of Lennox Robinson's *The White Blackbird* in April 1928 was followed by Ninette de Valois and her pupils dancing to music by Chopin and Glière, as well as a Mexican solo dance by de Valois.[119] In November 1929, Lady Gregory's *Spreading the News* and Yeats's *Oedipus the King* were produced alongside a "Turkish Ballet," a solo by de Valois called "A Daughter of Eve," and four other short dance pieces.[120] Victoria O'Brien claims that the School "most probably produced the first generation of classically trained dancers, teachers, choreographers and artistic directors that had been trained in Ireland."[121] Transmitted through de Valois, the pedagogy of Cecchetti and the pioneering choreographers of the Ballets Russes – Massine, Fokine, Balanchine, and Nijinska – influenced the technique of Irish dancers and exposed audiences in Dublin to more modern and inventive ballets in their national theatre space. This seismic change in the landscape of Irish performance culture stemmed from a conversation between Yeats and de Valois in 1927. By this point, Yeats's vision of a national literary theatre had clearly expanded to include dance as a discipline in its own right – a discipline that could be showcased alongside the output of Ireland's foremost playwrights and integrated into their dramatic works. Moreover, following de Valois's work on three separate productions of *Salomé* between 1929 and 1931, Yeats's plays for dancers began to demonstrate an even deeper preoccupation with the Wildean drama that had left its traces in his poetic idiolect for decades.

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[117] WBY to Pieter Nicolaas van Eyck, 4 June [1928], *CL InteLex* 5121.
[118] De Valois, *Come Dance With Me*, 89.
[119] Atlanta, GA, Stuart A. Rose Library, Emory University, Abbey Theatre Collection: Series 2, Box 2, Folder 58.
[120] Stuart A. Rose Library, Abbey Theatre Collection: Series 2, 2: 91.
[121] O'Brien, *A History of Irish Ballet*, 32,

"Dance, woman, dance!": Recreating a Myth

The Abbey Theatre programme for the 30 July 1934 lists the first performances of Yeats's *The King of the Great Clock Tower*, the play that bears perhaps the strongest comparison to Wilde's *Salomé* across Yeats's oeuvre.[122] In the short preface Yeats wrote for the first performances of *Clock Tower* at the Abbey, he accepts Wilde's influence to a small degree, acknowledging that he has used "the symbol used by Wilde in his 'Salome'."[123] On a cultural and historical level, however, Yeats separates himself from Wilde's play, refashioning Salome as a creature of Irish myth: "In an Irish form of perhaps the same symbol there is no dance, but the head of a slain lover singing to his mistress. I have combined dance and song."[124] Wilde's source material, according to Yeats, was Jewish, filtered through the German writer Heinrich Heine's *Atta Troll*; Yeats's mythical drama apparently derived from an old Irish narrative – a narrative missing the dance that becomes such a crucial device in *Clock Tower*. Yet despite the cagy tone of Yeats's commentaries, his play was certainly immersed in the modern legacies of the Salome myth, which he had contemplated in conjunction with Wilde, Mallarmé, and the serpentine dancers of the fin-de-siècle in many of his earlier works, as this chapter has shown. It is also significant that Yeats began to consciously engage with this complex literary material in the wake of his leading dancer's work on a number of *Salomé* productions.

It is important to note that Yeats's distancing of his own play from Wilde's "Jewish" material is telling on a political level. As many scholars have recounted, in 1933, Yeats spent a number of months in the company of the Irish Blueshirt General Eoin O' Duffy, and composed a selection of marching songs for the Blueshirts, believing them to be a tool against chaos and social disorder.[125] Although he later disavowed this period of Fascist sympathy – as he often disavowed his overtly political statements – it sits very uneasily alongside his rejection of Wilde's Jewish source in favour of an Irish national myth.[126] Yeats had betrayed his anti-Jewish

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[122] Stuart A. Rose Library, Abbey Theatre Collection: Series 2, 4: 64.
[123] Ibid.
[124] Ibid.
[125] See Conor Cruise O'Brien, "Passion and Cunning: An Essay on the Politics of W. B. Yeats," in *In Excited Reverie: Centenary Tribute to W. B. Yeats*, ed. A. Norman Jeffares and K. G. W. Cross (London: Macmillan, 1965), 207-278; Elizabeth Cullingford, *Yeats, Ireland and Fascism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1981).
[126] Yeats later called his entanglement with the Blueshirts "our political comedy." WBY to Olivia Shakespear, 20 September [1933], *CL InteLex* 5942.

feeling in a letter of 1931 to Olivia Shakespear, in which he wrote about his admiration for the "generation of Bergson," but added that he "hate[d] the Jewish element in Bergson, the deification of the moment, that for minds less hard & masculine than [Henri Gaudier-Brzeska's] turned the world into fruit-salad."[127] Antisemitism is here compounded by homophobia, with the "Jewish element," for Yeats, representing something corrosive and feminine, queer, and certainly not masculine. When this is read alongside Yeats's denial of Wilde's influence – which is also a denial of a queer author's hand – his recreation of the Salome narrative becomes a political as well as a literary act, and it emerges from a particularly unsavoury period of right-wing collusion.

Without erasing the political complexities of Yeats's refashioning of the Salome myth, it is possible to trace moments of productive ambivalence in his approach to this particular theme. In his introduction for the Cuala edition of *The King of the Great Clock Tower*, he again confronts the spectre of Wilde, arguing that the elder Irishman "had not made this legend his property" and suggesting that his own play "might give it a different setting":

> In the first edition of The Secret
> Rose there is a story bassed on so some old Gaelic legend
> A certain man swears to sing the praise of a certain
> Woman, his head is cut off & the head sings.
> A poem of mine ~~beg~~ called "He gives his Beloved Certain
> Rhymes" was the song of the head. In attempting to
> Put this story into a dance play I found that I had
> Recreated ~~the S this~~ Salome's dance.[128]

The deletions in the last line are perhaps a telling indicator of Yeats's uncertainty about the true extent of his "recreation." The themes of *Clock Tower* certainly bear striking similarities to Wilde's *Salomé*, despite Yeats's attempt to link the play to his own poetry, and his insistence that the "different setting" puts distance between the two works. These moments of doubt, wrought in the material traces of the play, foreground the intertextuality of *The King of the Great Clock Tower*, suggesting that Wilde's Symbolist dancer, and her many descendants, have returned with their thundering feet as Yeats predicted in "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen."

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[127] WBY to Olivia Shakespear, 2 August [1931], *CL InteLex* 5497.
[128] W. B. Yeats, *The King of the Great Clock Tower and A Full Moon in March: Manuscript Materials*, ed. Richard Allen Cave (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007), 333.

Reflecting the pensive mysticism of *At the Hawk's Well*, Yeats's *Clock Tower* is a drama of a remote place and time, described by a *Sunday Times* critic as "an adaptation to an Irish legendary setting of the theme of Salome."[129] The eponymous King is frustrated by the enduring silence of his Queen, who arrived at the Clock Tower one year previously and has been mute ever since. Unnerved, the King questions; "Why sit you there / Dumb as an image made of wood or metal / A screen between the living and the dead?" (*CP*, 634). Yeats's language calls attention to the play's design elements, particularly the Queen's "beautiful impassive mask" that quite literally renders her face "an image made of wood," perhaps securing the impersonality Yeats sought in his performers. The Queen is presented as a curious extension of this stage; her form is material, inarticulate and not quite human, much like the blue Craig screens that frame the fictive world. As such, she comes close to embodying the kind of actor Craig celebrated in his essay on the Über-Marionette: a manipulable symbol, wrought from the same stuff as the theatre's other controllable elements. The influence of the Japanese Nō is also evident in this this setting, particularly in the use of masks and the climactic dance sequence.

The royal stalemate is disrupted by the arrival of a Stroller, who announces that he has come to see the renowned beauty of the Queen for himself. To the King's horror he brazenly declares that the Queen shall dance for him, and in return he will sing for her and receive a kiss: "Your Queen, my mouth, the Queen shall kiss my mouth" (*CP*, 637). Once more, the dance performance becomes the play's critical nexus, focusing the opposing desires and acquisitive energies of the male characters. As Doody and others have noted, the familiar images of the dance, the head, and the kiss are all in evidence.[130] Unlike Wilde's Salome, however, the Queen does not encourage and divide her pursuers through speech, but remains silent, expressing herself only through a vocabulary of gestures, supported by the ventriloquism of others. At one point, the Second Attendant gives the Queen a distant voice, singing her song of strange violence and sexual conquest: "He longs to kill / My body, until / That sudden shudder / And limbs lie still" (*CP*, 638). The shudder of sexual ecstasy is framed as a climax of violence, recalling the paroxysms of Wilde's Salome before her bloody prize. This song precedes the Queen's dance, and although Yeats does not explicitly describe the performance in the stage directions, the tempo of the language

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[129] Anonymous critic, quoted in *Manuscript Materials*, lxviii.
[130] Doody, "An Echo of Someone Else's Music," 180.

suggests a building intensity and speed to the Queen's movements, with the King repeating his command: "Dance, woman, dance!" (*CP*, 639) Reviewers were captivated by de Valois's performance in this role, with the *Irish Times* theatre correspondent writing that "those of us who had not seen Miss Ninette de Valois before were amazed by the beauty of her dancing."[131]

If the possessed body of the Guardian in *At the Hawk's Well* seemed to redirect the dancer's authority to some external source, the ventriloquism in *The King of the Great Clock Tower* achieves a different effect. Transmitting her song through the other players on the stage, the dancing Queen is able to inhabit bodies that are not her own. Her muteness, ostensibly a sign of feminine passivity in the face of royal male authority, belies the extent of her bodily presence, which allows her vocal power to be uncannily redistributed. The Queen's silently dancing form therefore marks a rupture in the corporeal economy of the play, as she emerges as the author, not only of her own bodily language, but of the spectral voices pressed through the mouths of the musicians. Crucially, her movements also enliven the morbid object she carries in her hands: the severed head of the Stroller. "His eyelids tremble, his lips begin to move" (*CP*, 639), frets the anxious King, as the decollated face vibrates with an unearthly energy, and begins to sing. The ghost of an all too real body lingers behind this motif, if, as Kimberly Myers argues, the severed head constitutes Yeats's attempt to work through the issue of sexual impotence and the regeneration he experienced after his Steinach operation in April 1934.[132] Previously described as a "screen between the living and the dead," the dancing Queen lifts the veil separating inert and animated matter, restoring vitality to the limp object she carries.

Myers's psychoanalytic reading of the severed head certainly aligns with similar interpretations of Salome as a figure encoded with repressive anxieties – the "horror of virginity" in Mallarmé's terms. In his essay "The Taboo of Virginity" (1917), Freud uses the myth of Judith and Holofernes, another decapitation narrative, to theorise the female instinct to "take vengeance for her defloration," which, in Judith's case, is both sexual (as a symbolic act of castration) and political: killing

[131] "The Dublin Theatres: Abbey Players again on Tour; Winter Season Opens," *Irish Times*, October 3, 1934, ProQuest.

[132] Kimberly R. Myers, "W. B. Yeats's Steinach Operation, Hinduism, and the Severed-Head Plays of 1934-35," *Literature and Medicine* 28 (2009): 102-137.

Holofernes, she becomes "the liberator of her people."[133] A similar principle applies to Wilde's Salome, who also seeks revenge after what might be considered a sexual rite of passage, although she is finally punished by the restoration of monarchic power. However, in *The King of the Great Clock Tower*, Yeats, unlike Wilde, does not encode the final retaliation of patriarchal authority into the play's structure. The King, having "risen and drawn his sword" to mirror Herod's violence, "appears about to strike [the Queen], but kneels, laying the sword at her feet" (*CP*, 640). Through this symbolic show of deference to female rule, the Queen's dance is reconstituted as an act, not of amatory seduction, but of political self-determination. Her mute choreography redirects the source of meaning in the play from speech to gesture, and from words to bodies, turning her dancing form into the drama's central dispenser of authorial signification.

In the role of the Queen, then, Ninette de Valois emerges as a decisive creative force within the work. She carefully choreographed the dance drawing on her training in mime as well as the expressive gestural syntax she had honed in her work for Terence Gray on his expressionist productions of Greek tragedies.[134] As Richard Allen Cave has persuasively shown, "what is remarkable about the sequence of manuscript materials for *The King of the Great Clock Tower* […] is that they allow one to watch a *performance text* steadily come into being."[135] The revisions Yeats made to *Clock Tower* in 1934 were responsive to the demands of real performance; for instance, he restructured the text around the dance to allow de Valois "moments of repose."[136] This demonstrates that Yeats was making changes to his plays to reflect the physical requirements of dance, rather than merely thinking about the dancer in abstract terms. This is, of course, a crucial shift because it shows how his collaborations with de Valois effected developments in his own writing and literary production, with the dance itself shaping the text, rather than the text determining the nature of the dance. *The King of the Great Clock Tower* feeds off the physical elements of the stage – the screens and masks Yeats had long been working with – and the choreography of de Valois, whose performance determines the rhythm of the language; her dancing body shadowing the text's pauses and commands.

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[133] Sigmund Freud, "The Taboo of Virginity [1917],", in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 11: *Five Lectures on Psycho-Analysis, Leonardo da Vinci and Other Works*, trans. Angela Richards (London: The Hogarth Press, 1957), 207.
[134] Ibid., xliv.
[135] Cave, *Manuscript Materials*, xl.
[136] Ibid., xlv.

"There must be Severed Heads": Yeats's Departed Dancers

Yeats's numerous defences and clarifications on the subject of Wilde's influence have led scholars to look closely at the precedent *Salomé* set for the dance-dramas. Certainly, the imagery of the plays undeniably bears comparison: fateful gazes, violent dancers, and severed heads abound in Yeats's work, particularly from *At the Hawk's Well* onwards. Yeats's collaborations with dancers, however, set him apart from Wilde, who did not have the opportunity to work closely with a performer to determine how the choreography would shape the course of *Salomé*. Indeed, in his thinking about physical performance, Yeats was conscious of the need for real bodies to bring life to the visual promise of language. He wrote to his father; "Rhythm implies a living body a breast to rise & fall or limbs that dance while the abstract [is] incompatible with life."[137] It is this living body that he summons in his final play, *The Death of Cuchulain*, which opens with an Old Man's impassioned call for a real dancer:

> I promise a dance. I wanted a dance because where there are no words there is less to spoil. Emer must dance, there must be severed heads – I am old, I belong to mythology – severed heads for her to dance before. I had thought to have had those heads carved, but no, if the dancer can dance properly no wood carving can look as well as a parallelogram of painted wood. But I was at my wit's end to find a good dancer; I could have got such a dancer once, but she has gone; the tragi-comedian dancer, the tragic dancer, upon the same neck love and loathing, life and death. I spit three times. I spit upon the dancers painted by Degas. I spit upon their short bodies, their stiff stays, their toes whereon they spin like peg-tops, above all upon that chambermaid face. (*CP*, 694)

In this soliloquy, Yeats uses the Old Man's voice to explicate the relationship between text and performance, articulating the very difficulties that he himself faced throughout his career writing plays for dancers. This Old Man too is at his "wit's end to find a good dancer," following the departure of "the tragic dancer" who could have done the performance justice, perhaps Michio Ito or Ninette de Valois, both long "gone" from the Abbey. The violence with which the Old Man rejects the romantic ballerinas painted in a famous series by Edgar Degas is telling: Yeats decries the stiffness of their bodies, suggesting that his own choreographic preferences lie elsewhere, in the freer movement practised by Isadora Duncan and Loïe Fuller, or

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[137] WBY to J. B. Yeats, 14 March [1916], *CL InteLex* 2902.

the strains of expressionism and mime that shaped the dances of even a classically trained performer like de Valois.

Yeats's ideal dancer, then, possesses not so much the strict discipline of the prima ballerina but the apparent spontaneity and creative individualism of modern dancers. This observation is not grounded in an effort to cleave an unwarranted division between ballet and other dance practices: for Ellis, it "would have been inconceivable" for Ninette de Valois to "mould her talent so as to appear in a 'free' dance" in *At the Hawk's Well* "without the Duncan phenomenon and the iconoclasm of Diaghilev's Ballets Russes."[138] Yeats's ruminations on the ideal dancer in *The Death of Cuchulain* importantly suggest that he placed a high value on the performer who danced, not merely with habitual pre-determined gestures, but with a sense of creative intent, using her body to devise a new language for his stage. An element of freedom for the performer, central to the practice of modern dancers, is therefore crucial to the realisation of Yeats's dramatic instincts.

Once again, Salome is the figure who dances, veiled, at the heart of these plays. "There must be severed heads," insists the Old Man, articulating Yeats's fidelity to his drama's mythical precepts. The "parallelogram of painted wood" that signifies the severed head in *The Death of Cuchulain* is a curious prop, stationed somewhere between the mask and the screen in the complex material world of Yeats's stage. For Paige Reynolds, this parallelogram indicates that Yeats was finally able to "rely on the unsettled and irreconcilable nature of the material," a difficulty that he had consistently encountered in his dealings with the severed head as an object and its communicative power, as demonstrated in *A Full Moon in March* (1935), a lyrical dramatic reworking of *The King of the Great Clock Tower*.[139] An object inscribed with violent and erotic potentiality, the severed head is used to signal liveliness and renewal, in spite of its suggestion of execution: its muteness, its stillness. Indeed, the moment of Cuchulain's decapitation in this play marks the beginning of Emer's dance, directed by the Morrigu, "a woman with a crow's head," holding "a black parallelogram," with "six other parallelograms near the backcloth" (*CP*, 703). Seven in number, these parallelograms symbolically infer a Yeatsian dance of the seven veils, charging the artificial space of the stage with a transformative energy, mirrored by the actors as "Emer runs in and begins to dance*"* (*CP*, 703). The physical space of the

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[138] Ellis, *The Plays of W. B. Yeats*, 228.
[139] Paige Reynolds, "'A Theatre of the Head': Material Culture, Severed Heads, and the Late Drama of W. B. Yeats," *Modern Drama* 58 (2015): 453.

theatre thus constitutes an exceptionally powerful device in Yeats's dance-dramas. Like the body of his Salomean Queen, it *performs*, speaking a silent language through a vocabulary of movement. Yeats's plays chronicle an ongoing dialogue between the image as it is rendered in poetic language, and its choreographic realisation. For Eliot, it was through the "gradual purging out of poetic ornament" in the later plays for dancers that Yeats discovered "his right and final dramatic form."[140] Yeats's admission, in the Old Man's speech, that he "wanted a dance because where there are no words there is less to spoil," taps into a particular anxiety around the capacity of words to speak truly, a scepticism about language that reaches its pause-laden apex in Beckett's tightly choreographed dramas.

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[140] Eliot, "Yeats," 85.

CODA
"Bovril into Salome": Samuel Beckett's Decollated Dancers

I have chosen to mark the closing of this thesis with a coda that explores Beckett's idiosyncratic relationship with the figure of Salome. Across Beckett's corpus, signs of Salome are phantasmal, elusive, and difficult to identify, yet traces of her dance persist in texts as temporally and formally distinct as *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* and the late works *Not I* and *Quad*. The particular nature of Beckett's interest in Salome therefore calls for a different kind of critical presentation. The types of evidence I draw upon are disparate and unsettled in nature, revealing traces of Beckett's moorings in older sources and schools, but always reformulating his influences in new and unreconciled ways. This is typical of a writer who worked to cultivate a sense of wry distance from his forebears and contemporaries – he famously protested that he had "never read much Yeats. Never read much anything."[1] Yet Beckett quietly immersed himself in the output of Yeats, and a great deal more besides.[2] Reflecting on Beckett's responses to Salome through the scattered and allusive textures of his visual world, I map his subtle engagements with the Symbolist and avant-garde approaches to the performing body considered in previous chapters and show how the figure of the veiled dancer took an elemental place in his dramatic imagination.

Not only was Beckett fascinated by dance, as his attendance at various ballet productions in the 1930s suggests, but he also owed much to the dramatic theorists and practitioners who applied their ideas about choreographed movement to the modern theatre – from Kleist and Edward Gordon Craig to Yeats and Maeterlinck.[3] His late drama in particular shows that Beckett shares with these writers a sustained desire to work through the conceptual and practical difficulties presented by the body

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[1] Samuel Beckett to Aidan Higgins, quoted in Dirk van Hulle and Mark Nixon, *Samuel Beckett's Library* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), xvii.

[2] Beckett mocked the poets of the Literary Revival in his essay "Recent Irish Poetry," which apparently infuriated Yeats. See *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment*, ed. Ruby Cohn (London: Grove Press, 1983), 70. Yet, as John Harrington notes, Yeats himself is treated with "qualified admiration" in this essay, and some of Beckett's later work, "by allusion suggests affinity with the work of Synge and Yeats." See *The Irish Beckett* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1991), 63. Billie Whitelaw also claimed that Beckett "read his own work and that of Yeats better than anyone I know." See *Billie Whitelaw…Who He? An Autobiography* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1996), 140.

[3] See Anthony Uhlmann, "Expression and Affect in Kleist, Beckett, and Deleuze," in *Deleuze and Performance*, ed. Laura Cull (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 54-70; James Knowlson and John Pilling, "Beckett and Kleist's Essay 'On the Marionette Theater'," in *Frescoes of the Skull: The Later Prose and Drama of Samuel Beckett* (New York: Grove Press, 1980), 227-85.

of the performer as an element of his dramatic compositions. This often results in uneasy presentations of control in Beckett's plays, since his work frequently demands the surrender of the human body to the authority of the playwright, ensured by strict textual directions. On this subject, however, Preston has argued that "Beckett used his theater to examine the very issues of agency, submission, subversion, and authority that have troubled critics of his directing style," challenging critical assumptions about the value of individual agency in performance by stressing the lessons made possible through the art of submission.[4] Dance has consistently emerged as an ideal medium for the realisation of these impulses, and this was certainly true for Beckett: as Jones has recently argued, a "language of movement" must be added to the languages of names, voices, and images that Gilles Deleuze proposed as central to Beckett's dramatic system. It is, Jones maintains, dance that offers the most relevant model for such an account of movement in Beckett, as it was to dance that he often turned to furnish his ideas about the performing body.[5] In particular, the tantalising juxtaposition of dance with presentations of bodily severance – inextricable from Salome's legacy – manifests with extraordinary regularity in Beckett's work, apparently providing him with an appropriate visual scheme for his experiments in vocal delivery and bodily form.

It might seem unusual to read these plays in terms of their connections to dance, since Beckett's drama has frequently been interpreted as a testament to forms of immobility and inertia, indicated by Deleuze's well-known diagnosis of the condition of exhaustion in his essay "L'Épuisé" ("The Exhausted").[6] Yet Beckett often embraced these apparent polarities of corporeal experience within single texts. Challenging the "critical myths" that have long stipulated the inevitability of "disembodiment, silence and stasis" in Beckett's work, Ulrika Maude has recuperated the status of the material body in Beckett, insisting upon its centrality as a site of sensory experience and meaningful possibility, even in its most severed and abject states.[7] The body is not, she emphasises, merely a diminished vessel for the incisive operations of thought, but a crucial marker of knowledge and feeling in the very physically-oriented sphere of Beckett's stage, with its "astonishing gallery of postures,

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[4] Carrie J. Preston, *Learning to Kneel: Noh, Modernism, and Journeys in Teaching* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 226.
[5] Jones, *Literature, Modernism and Dance*, 279.
[6] Gilles Deleuze, "The Exhausted," trans. Anthony Uhlmann, *SubStance* 24, no. 3 (1995): 3-28.
[7] Ulrika Maude, *Beckett, Technology and the Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 4.

gaits, and positions," to use Deleuze's terms.[8] Beckett's intense preoccupation with the language of dance, and with dancers themselves, implies a deep affiliation with the writers, filmmakers, and performers this thesis has drawn together as elements in a wider constellation of aesthetic forms and practices, repeatedly returning to the Salome myth.

Indeed, critics and performers of Beckett's work have long deferred to the terms of choreography in their accounts of his plays. After performing in a recent production of *Not I*, the actor Lisa Dwan (who is also a trained dancer) admitted that she "now approach[es] all [Beckett's] work predominantly as a dancer, first allowing all the elements of the poetry to play itself out, the visuals, the rhythmics, the sensor stimulus – this is vast holistic work that simply will not be served from the neck up."[9] Dwan stresses her own role in responding to the work as a creative practitioner and recalls the accounts of her mentor Billie Whitelaw, who also reached for choreographic metaphors to support her recollections of working with Beckett on *Not I* and *Footfalls* (1976), which he wrote with her specifically in mind. These performers suggest that dance defines Beckett's language in terms of its rhythm and structure, but also that it works as an underlying element of his spatial compositions and stage directions, requiring them to think and move like dancers. Furthermore, the vexed question of the dancer's creative position within these works, and attendant concerns about the presiding control of the playwright, manifest in complex relationships between the writer and the body of the actor within the texts this coda considers.

"Danced through its seven phases": Early Salomean Echoes

Beckett's debt to the Symbolist movement that inspired Wilde's *Salomé* has been comprehensively outlined by Worth, who observes that "many lines of the European imagination meet in Beckett, but as playwright he is above all the heir of Yeats and the Irish/ French drama [of the late nineteenth century]," which included playwrights such as Wilde, Maeterlinck, and Jarry.[10] Worth's pioneering study offers many

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[8] Deleuze, "The Exhausted," 6.
[9] Lisa Dwan, "Mouth Almighty – How Billie Whitelaw helped me find Beckett and *Not I*," *American Theatre*, 12 April 2016. http://www.americantheatre.org/2016/04/12/mouth-almighty-how-billie-whitelaw-helped-me-find-beckett-and-not-i/. Accessed 10 July 2017.
[10] Worth, *Irish Drama*, 241.

valuable insights into the nature of Beckett's interest in Yeats and Symbolist drama. Encompassing a range of formal and aesthetic connections, her trans-national approach complicates the rubrics that have often dominated in Beckett studies, as cogently dismantled in recent work by Emilie Morin and Seán Kennedy.[11] Morin has shown that although "Beckett remained extremely sceptical about the domains of aesthetic and thematic investigation in the post-Revival period," the avant-garde elements of Yeats's dance-dramas aligned themselves with the "principles and processes of modernism," to which Beckett was so indebted.[12] When Cyril Cusack asked him to write something for a centenary programme on George Bernard Shaw, Beckett's reply was revealing:

> I wouldn't suggest that G. B. S. is not a great playwright, whatever that is when it's at home. What I would do is give the whole unupsettable apple-cart for a sup of the Hawk's Well, or the Saints', or a whiff of Juno, to go no further.[13]

Beckett's preference for *At the Hawk's Well* show how his own thematic preoccupations and formal interests were developing in relation to twentieth-century Irish theatre. Although he had little time for the realist drama of Shaw, he appreciated the plays of Yeats, Synge, and Sean O'Casey, which dared to engage with the challenges modernism posed to dramatic form, moving away from the early populist leanings of the Abbey. Beckett was a regular at the Abbey Theatre during his time in Dublin, where he saw productions of *At the Hawk's Well* in 1930 and 1933. It is therefore likely that he also witnessed the work of the Abbey School of Ballet, whose dancers often performed in and alongside dramatic productions.[14]

Yeats's collaborations with Ninette de Valois and the growing centrality of dance to the vision of the Abbey likely resonated with Beckett's own early fascination with techniques of movement and bodily control. As it was for Yeats, the idea of dance strongly appealed to Beckett as a possible model for the relationship between director and performer, which he believed would require a kind of "exacting

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[11] Regarding the tendency to write about an Irish or a European Beckett, Morin argues that the "either/or dynamic in critical approaches" to Beckett masks the "specificity of his experiences in Ireland, France, Germany and Great Britain." See *Problem of Irishness*, 2. Also see Seán Kennedy, ed. *Beckett and Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[12] Emilie Morin, *Samuel Beckett and the Problem of Irishness* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 11; 25.

[13] Samuel Beckett quoted in James Knowlson, *Samuel Beckett: An Exhibition* (London: Turrett, 1971) 14.

[14] Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, 56-57.

choreographic work" similar, in Preston's view, to the methods of Yeats.[15] Hannah Simpson has persuasively shown that while Beckett shared Yeats's "desire for his actors' carefully controlled precision" in performance, he developed this model into a "more nuanced idea of shared creative agency," particularly in his collaborations with Whitelaw.[16] It is also important to note that despite Beckett's interest in the portentous, hieratic movement vocabulary of *At the Hawk's Well*, he was often sceptical about Yeats's work, and derided the dancing in *The King of the Great Clock Tower* as "the Valois rolling her uterine areas with conviction."[17] Beckett, a mercurial author, often provided contradictory opinions on the work of his elders and contemporaries, and this was certainly true of Yeats, whose poetry he read and saw performed often, and in some cases, knew by heart, despite his cynicism. However ambivalently Beckett received it, Yeats's work offered him an important precedent for the integration of dance into dramatic compositions, as well as a prototype for the collaborative relationship between playwright and choreographer.

These Yeatsian plays, as observed in the previous chapter, revolved around the myth of Salome, which followed Yeats across his many experiments with dance in the theatre, often in his allusions to the Sidhe. It is perhaps no surprise that it is in Beckett's first novel, composed in the early 1930s at a time when he was an Abbey regular, that Salome makes one of her most conspicuous appearances. In *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, Salome's dance is resurrected in an incandescent display of light, familiar of course in the wake of Fuller's choreographies. "Emerging happy body from the hot bowels of McLoughlin's," the protagonist Belacqua finds himself navigating the streets of Dublin during the festive season. Coming to the crossing by Trinity College Dublin, he lingers upon the sight of the famous Bovril sign erected on the corner of College Green:

> Bright and cheery above the strom of the College Green, as though coached by the star of Bethlehem, the Bovril sign danced and danced through its seven phases.
> The lemon of faith jaundiced, annunciating the series, was in a fungus of hopeless green reduced to shingles and abolished. Next, in reverence for the slain, the light went out. A sly ooze of gules, carmine of solicitation, lifting

[15] Preston, *Learning to Kneel,* 226.

[16] Hannah Simpson, "'Now Keep Out of the Way, Whitelaw': Self-Expression, Agency, and Directorial Control in W. B. Yeats's and Samuel Beckett's Theatre," *Comparative Drama* 49 (2015): 415.

[17] Samuel Beckett to Thomas McGreevy, 7 August [1934], in *The Letters of Samuel Beckett*, vol. 1: *1929-1940*, ed. Martha Dow Fehsenfeld and Lois More Overbeck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2009), 217.

the skirts of green that the prophecy might be fulfilled, shocking Gabriel into cherry, annexed the sign. But the long skirts rattled down, darkness covered their shame, the cycle was at an end. Da Capo.

> Bovril into Salome, thought Belacqua, and Tommy Moore there with his head on his shoulders.[18]

Reimagined as a dancer, the static material of the Bovril sign, enlivened by its electric illumination, approaches the conditions of embodiment, albeit in amorphous and incomplete form: it is fungal; it oozes and floods; its "long skirts" reconstitute Salome's veils. Yet the dance of Beckett's sign, which creates such a mass of protean matter, abruptly concludes upon the point of revelation, or perhaps the sexual consummation suggested by its "cherry […] shame" and the skirts that swiftly close. Having performed Salome's game of exposure and concealment, the sign begins again, conducted by Beckett's musical instruction: "Da Capo." The literal translation of this term ("from the head") not only implies the dance's reiteration, but gestures towards the unstable "head" severed from the body of the Baptist: the second key motif in the story of Salome. The nearby statue of the Irish poet Thomas Moore, Beckett's John the Baptist figure, may have "his head on his shoulders" for the time being, but the sculpture had previously been decapitated when it was placed on its pedestal in 1857, as Joyce wryly recalls in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916).[19]

Beckett's response to Salome can be read through these suggestive intertextual echoes. Indeed, Joyce specifically alludes to the biblical tale of Salome and John the Baptist in *A Portrait*, when Dedalus compares the elderly parents of his friend Cranly to "the exhausted loins […] of Elisabeth and Zachary," the aged parents of the Baptist. When he thinks of Cranly, Dedalus sees "always a stern severed head or deathmask as if outlined on a grey curtain or veronica. […] What do I see? A decollated precursor trying to pick the lock."[20] Joyce's complex distilling of the religious sources into a satirical recurring trope – of Cranly's "deathmask" – reflects the kind of bleak humour Beckett himself favoured in his images of bodily severance, which became increasingly central to the visual register of his drama. Attempting to visualise Cranly, Dedalus is never able to "raise before his mind the entire image of his body but only the image of the head and face."[21] The slippage between the

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[18] Beckett, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, 200.
[19] James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, ed. Jeri Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 151.
[20] Ibid., 209. Stephen Dedalus confuses John the Baptist with John the Evangelist, recalling the story of St John before the Latin Gate with this reference to the lock.
[21] Ibid., 149.

pronoun and the definite article, from "*his* body" to "*the* head," marks a subtle change in property: the severed head, for Joyce, is a body part dispossessed. It signals the dislocation of the subject and raises troubling questions about what kind of agency this decollated form might possess. Such ambiguously constituted figures haunt Beckett's stage, and those detached faces imagined by Joyce, with whom Beckett worked closely in the late 1920s, return in the partial bodies of *Happy Days* (1961), *Play* (1964), and *That Time* (1975), forms "shadowed by remembered or imagined incarnations," according to Anna McMullan.[22] In light of the rich Salomean histories I have traced, Beckett's allusion to Salome and the Baptist in the *Dream* is not as incidental as it might first appear. This seemingly minor reference belies Salome's much deeper purchase on the choreographic imagination of the period, and it should be no surprise that it was to her dance that Beckett turned in this early novel.

Such dancing bodies, for Beckett, took on both real and abstract forms. It was also during his encounters with Yeats and Joyce, and the writing of the *Dream,* that he formed important relationships with dancers whose work would have a lasting influence on his interest in choreography. Beckett's first serious romantic relationship was with his cousin Peggy Sinclair, who appears in barely veiled form as the "Smeraldina-Rima" in the *Dream* and the short story collection *More Pricks than Kicks* (1934). In late 1928, Sinclair had offered Beckett his first insight into modern methods of rhythmic exercise when she enrolled at Émile Jaques-Dalcroze's Schule Hellerau-Laxenburg, located nine miles south of Vienna.[23] Dalcroze's techniques of eurhthymics, improvisation, and soflège, designed to complement and enhance the body's rhythmic and musical intuition, had a profound influence on the dancers who visited and trained at his schools, including Marie Rambert, Nijinsky, and Diaghilev.[24] When Beckett visited Sinclair at the school in October 1928, he absorbed enough of this Dalcrozean programme to satirise its essentials with biting accuracy in his first novel as "the very vanguardful Schule Dunkelbrau," home to classes on "Harmonie, Anatomie, Psychologie, Improvisation, with a powerful ictus on the last syllable in each case."[25] While Dalcroze's methods might not strictly constitute dance, they certainly influenced some of the period's most innovative choreographers, and placed

[22] Anna McMullan, *Performing Embodiment in Samuel Beckett's Drama* (London: Routledge, 2010), 3.
[23] Knowlson, *Damned to Fame,* 83.
[24] Selma Landen Odom, "The Dalcroze Method, Marie Rambert, and *Le Sacre du Printemps*," *Modernist Cultures* 9 (2014): 9-11.
[25] Beckett, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, 13-14.

rhythm, gesture, and harmony at the centre of dialogues concerning the human body's relationship to the movements of modernity – a relationship often characterised by ideas of fissure, mechanisation, and irregularity.

Despite his parodic treatment of Sinclair's education in the *Dream*, these elements of Dalcrozean pedagogy can be discerned in Beckett's own work. Beckett's directorial style has long been characterised as overbearing, given his determined control over almost every aspect of production, from the actors' delivery of the text, to the requirements of lighting and staging. In this sense, he shared Dalcroze's and Adolphe Appia's belief that the designer-director should "bring all the elements of the stage into harmony," although with Appia this correlated to a Wagnerian understanding of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, which Beckett criticised.[26] More importantly, however, Dalcroze's emphasis on the body's rhythmic intuition bears direct relevance to Beckett's instructions to his actors to pay attention to the tempo of his words rather than the meaning. For instance, Whitelaw has described how she and Beckett would sit and annotate the script for *Play* with little dots to denote particular rhythms and moments of emphasis: "I can't read or write music, but if I were a musician I'd have put a crotchet instead of a quaver."[27] In the Foreword to *Rhythm, Music and Education* (1921), written for Appia, Dalcroze had outlined the essential connections between rhythm and human sensory capabilities, advocating "an intimate understanding of the synergies and conflicting forces of our bodies," accompanied by a knowledge of "the many processes of counterpointing, phrasing, and shading musical rhythms with a view to their plastic expression."[28] Although Dalcroze's techniques promoted a form of individualism and creative expression somewhat at odds with Beckett's apparent emphasis on depersonalisation, it was through watching his cousin train at Laxenburg that Beckett discovered a system of movement that privileged the body as a site of somatic meaning akin to music.

As we have seen in the case of Yeats, however, attempts to master or control the body of the performer can create an uneasy imbalance between dancer and writer. It was Peggy Sinclair who embodied this dance practice for Beckett, but it is her body, grounded in metaphors of feminine softness, that becomes a source of misogynistic

[26] Knowlson details how Beckett "simply never liked opera" and "heartily disliked Wagner." *Damned to Fame*, 194. For a discussion of Beckett and generic differentiation, in opposition to *Gesamtkunstwerk*, see Yoshiki Tajiri, "Beckett and Synaesthesia," *Samuel Beckett Today/ Aujourd'hui* 11 (2001): 183.

[27] Whitelaw, *Who He?*, 78.

[28] Émile Jaques-Dalcroze, "Foreword," in *Rhythm, Music and Education*, trans. Harold F. Rubinstein (London: Chatto & Windus, 1921), xi.

ridicule in the *Dream*: "Poppata, big breech, Botticelli thighs, knock-knees, ankles all fat nodules, wobbly, mamose, slobbery-blubbery, bubbub-bubbub, a real button-bursting Weib, ripe."[29] In this passage, language collapses into senselessness, producing an unstructured body that is all flesh and no thought. A young Beckett's difficulties in accommodating the female body as a source of creative energy and purpose, rather than of bovine excess, emerges at moments such as these, which recur all too often in this early novel. "Whether paragon or parody," Susan Brienza declares, "woman [in the early fiction] is limited to the body and to the emotions."[30] The Sinclairs were also deeply unhappy with Beckett's uncharitable inclusion of one of his cousin's letters in the story "The Smeraldina's Billet-Doux" in *More Pricks*, published shortly after her early death from tuberculosis.[31]

Despite Beckett's acerbic portrayals of this young dancer in his prose, and the uncomfortable questions this raises about his attitude towards women's bodies in these works, Peggy Sinclair's Dalcrozean education undoubtedly informed Beckett's developing choreographic imagination. Furthermore, Beckett's interest in dance led him to confront the material reality of the performing body, which proved to be a less readily caricatured and assimilated form in his plays than Sinclair's body becomes in the *Dream*. It is not only the internal rhythms of language – its repetitions, echoes, and permutations – that determine the tempo of a Beckett play, but the acoustic traces the actors deliver on stage: the tapping of May's steps in *Footfalls*, the rapping of the Listener's knuckles in *Ohio Impromptu* (1981), and the sheer speed of Whitelaw and Lisa Dwan's speech in their respective performances as Mouth in *Not I*. Dalcroze's prioritising of a bodily musicality, either vocalised or in silent gesture, fed into Beckett's later understanding of the relationship between text and performance. In this way, those decollated forms he absorbed through Joyce and Yeats became sources of rhythm and liveliness, as well as corporeal incompleteness.

Beckett's interest in dance, although not without his usual caveats and qualifications, continued apace throughout the 1930s.[32] He had an ill-fated relationship with the dancer Lucia Joyce, and apparently kept a photograph of her in

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[29] Beckett, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, 15.
[30] Susan Brienza, "Clods, Whores, and Bitches: Misogyny in Beckett's Early Fiction," in *Women in Beckett: Performance and Critical Perspectives*, ed. Linda Ben-Zvi (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 91.
[31] Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, 148.
[32] Beckett was critical of Massine's "symphonic ballets" and he reflected on his preference for music in a letter to his cousin, Morris Sinclair. See Beckett to Morris Sinclair, 13 July-2 August [1934], *Letters*, 1, 215; Beckett to Thomas MacGreevy, 26 July [1936], in *Letters*, 1, 362.

costume for the rest of his life.[33] Joyce, also well-versed in Dalcrozean technique, was a pupil at Raymond Duncan's dance school in Salzburg, and her practice was influenced by his incorporation of Hellenic aesthetics into his teaching.[34] Beckett also developed an important friendship with the dancer Gret Palucca, who had begun her training in Dresden with Mary Wigman and performed in her *Seven Dances of Life*, a "dance-poem" inspired by the story of Salome.[35] Moreover, as several scholars have detailed, Beckett attended a number of ballet performances that were to leave a lasting impression on him, including *Petrouchka*, which he saw with both Massine and Woizikowksy in the lead role.[36] This ballet offered Beckett, according to Jones, "major gestural and spatial models" that he would turn to in his own work for the stage: "the situation of entrapment in a closed space; the threatening gesture and haunting repetitions of an uncanny closure."[37] The spatial traps of early plays like *Endgame* (1957) notably evolve into more contracted forms of enclosure in, for example, the urns of *Play* and the narrow "strip" trod endlessly by May in *Footfalls* (*CDW*, 399). Such works demonstrate, in a very physical sense, the containment of the actor's body within the tight parameters of Beckett's stage world. These early encounters with dancers, and with Salomean imagery, stimulated a fascination with the choreographic potential of reduced and severed bodies that Beckett would return to across his work.

"Whole body like gone": From *Not I* to *Quad*

It is productive to trace a deepening focus on dance and movement in Beckett's creative output but, as a number of scholars have observed, this turn to choreography corresponds with a growing interest in the representation of broken and beleaguered human forms.[38] Combining the images of the dancer and the severed head, Beckett's late plays generate intricately structured, rhythmically congruent utterances delivered

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[33] Beckett saw Lucia Joyce perform at the Bal Bullier in Paris in May 1929. The photograph was of her in her scaly, "fish" costume. See John Pilling, *A Samuel Beckett Chronology* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 20. For more on this performance and Joyce's life, see Carol Loeb Shloss, *Lucia Joyce: To Dance in the Wake* (London: Bloomsbury, 2005).

[34] Shloss, *Lucia Joyce*, 100-120.

[35] See Knowlson, *Damned to Fame*, 250-252; Susan Manning, *Ecstasy and the Demon: The Dances of Mary Wigman* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 100.

[36] Jones catalogues these encounters in *Literature, Modernism and Dance*, 279-306; see also Thomas Mansell, "Describing Arabesques: Beckett and Dance," in *Beckett and Musicality*, ed. Sarah Jane Bailes and Nicholas Till (London: Routledge, 2014), 102-113.

[37] Jones, *Literature, Modernism and Dance*, 285.

[38] McMullan, *Performing Embodiment,* 4.

by heads and mouths apparently divorced from bodies that remain unseen. The lone head situated "10 feet above stage level" in *That Time*, luminous and pale against the black set, strongly recalls notable paintings of a decapitated Baptist, such as Andrea Solari's *Head of St John the Baptist* (1507) and Moreau's *The Apparition*. In the 2001 *Beckett on Film* production of *That Time*, such a comparison is substantiated by the way that the head is not merely foregrounded by an external source of light, but seems to be a source of strange and radiant light itself. Alert and drawing breath as he listens to "his own" modulated voices (*CDW*, 388), the severed head in *That Time* subtly reworks the ideas of ventriloquism and disembodiment staged by Yeats in his earlier negotiations with Salome's dance, with which Beckett was intimately familiar.

The object of the severed head clearly offered Beckett a stark fulfilment of his fascination with bodies in states of immobility and disrepair, which developed alongside his interest in the vital rhythms of gesture and speech. When he took a trip to Malta in October 1971, he visited St John's Cathedral in Valletta, where he spent over an hour contemplating Caravaggio's *Decollation of St. John the Baptist* (1608). In letters to his biographer James Knowlson and the artist Avigdor Arikha, he revealed the significant impression left by this painting, extracting from its stark and gruesome tableaux the kernel of an idea for a play of his own.[39] The old woman standing next to Salome in Caravaggio's scene, holding her face in her hands as she watches the execution of the Baptist, became the model for the figure of the Auditor in *Not I*.[40] A veiled and anonymous presence concealed beneath a djellaba, the Auditor repeats the old woman's "gesture of helpless compassion," punctuating the fervent and hypnotic utterances of another severed body part: Mouth (*CDW*, 375). Mouth is a decollated object with her own cranial obsessions: snatches of text telling of a "dull roar in the skull" (*CDW*, 378) and "the whole body like gone" (*CDW*, 382) contrive an image of a human figure in pieces, yet she also performs what might be considered as a frantic verbal dance, structured by what Whitelaw calls "the dynamic rhythms of Beckett's word-music."[41]

The image of the Baptist's execution certainly lingered with Beckett until late in his life. In a letter of March 1986, composed many years after his initial encounter with Caravaggio's *Decollation*, Beckett described his response to the painting to Edith

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[39] Knowlson, *Damned to Fame,* 588.
[40] The Auditor was ultimately removed from stage productions of *Not I* as Beckett began to experiment with the play in performance. However, a very similar figure reappears in *Quad*.
[41] Whitelaw, *Who He?,* 78.

Kern: "[It] shows, outside & beyond the main area, at a safe distance from it, a group of watchers intent on the happening. Before the painting, from another outsidededness, I behold both the horror & its being beheld."[42] These bystanders – the old woman, likely Herodias, and the two prisoners watching from their cell – certainly accord with the waiting, listening, often arrested figures that populate Beckett's stage world. Morin has suggested that the *Decollation* may have offered Beckett "a formal precedent for his own distribution of zones of light and darkness on stage," with the dramatic illumination of the beheading, and the barely lit figures observing from the gloom.[43] The painting's proportion of dark and apparently empty space, enfolding the central figures in a framing blackness, also reflects Beckett's own use of negative space, and his deliberate, sparing deployment of props and lighting. The stage in *Not I*, for instance, is "in darkness but for MOUTH […] faintly lit from close-up and below" (*CDW*, 376). Unlike other paintings depicting this biblical scene, such as Caravaggio's earlier treatment of the subject *Salome with the Head of John the Baptist* (c. 1607), the *Decollation* does not foreground the severed head, bloody and inanimate, at the centre of the work. Rather, Caravaggio shows the *act* of decapitation, relegating the figure of the Baptist to the bottom of the frame in a state somewhere between life and death – wholeness and division – as the executioner bears down on him, and Salome readies her platter. It is this immediate negotiation with the boundaries of liveliness that bears a key relevance to Beckett's engagement with the motif of the severed head and, indeed, with the dance that we imagine precedes it.

Taking Beckett at his word and reading *Not I* as a dramatic mediation on the biblical scene depicted by Caravaggio produces these kinds of suggestive comparisons in which a language of the body is paramount, despite the sense of physical constraint and claustrophobia that defined Whitelaw's experience in this role. Nowhere is the sense of corporeal restriction suggested by *Not I* more apparent, perhaps, than in Beckett's late dance play *Quad*, a work written for television that was first broadcast by the German network Süddeutscher Rundfunk as *Quadrat 1 + 2* in 1981 and published in 1984. *Quad* involves four hooded players pacing a square area along their own "particular course" (*CDW*, 451), moving along the peripheries and towards the centre, a "danger zone" (*CDW*, 453) from which they all sharply deviate. Although some scholars have argued that *Quad* "reduces, crystallizes and foregrounds elements

42 SB to Edith Kern, 15 March 1986, *Letters* 4, 671.
43 Morin, *Problem of Irishness*, 150.

of artistic expression that are specific to the theater,"[44] Beckett crucially composed this televisual work for the Stuttgart Preparatory Ballet School and wrote in his directions that it was "desirable" that the players should have "some ballet training" (*CDW*, 453). As a dance piece, and a work for television, *Quad* reveals Beckett looking to other media and modes of performance beyond or, at least, in conjunction with the theatre.

As McMullan has shown, the visual premise for *Quad* can be found in the incomplete "J. M. Mime" (1963), a play written for the actor Jack MacGowran that was directly conceived around the image of Thomas Browne's quincunx, which appears as a symbol of God's wisdom his work *The Garden of Cyrus* (1658).[45] In this work, Browne describes the quincunx as "the emphatical decussation, or fundamental figure," an image reproduced throughout art and the natural world as evidence of the elaborately conceived but perfectly repeated design of an intelligent creator.[46] In *Quad*, however, Beckett's interest in this symbol appears to reveal the dull horror of repetition, echoing his earlier use of the figure in his prose piece *The Lost Ones* (1970). In this short text, the unfortunate inhabitants of a vast and placeless cylinder, condemned to varying extents to a life of continuous movement, must search a network of chambers "disposed in irregular quincunxes roughly ten metres in diameter and cunningly out of line."[47] The quincunx here, as in *Quad*, plots the course of the characters' motions, with each step signalling the certainty of their incarceration.

There are other sources, however, for Beckett's use of the quincunx that shed a different light on the nature of these strictly patterned movements. In an early response to *Quad*, Herta Schmid reads this text as a sustained exercise in metatheatre, "revealing the constant inner form of dramatic theatre."[48] Her article situates Beckett in relation to the historical avant-garde, stressing *Quad*'s links to Oskar Schlemmer's Bauhaus theatre experiments (through Appia's concept of "rhythmic spaces") and

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[44] Sandra Wynands, *Iconic Spaces: The Dark Theology of Samuel Beckett's Drama* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 115.

[45] Anna McMullan, "Samuel Beckett's 'J. M. Mime': Generic Mutations of a Dramatic Fragment," *Samuel Beckett Today/ Aujourd'hui* 16, no. 1 (2006): 333-345.

[46] Thomas Browne, *The Garden of Cyrus* (London: 1736), 4, Gale Eighteenth Century Collections Online.

[47] Samuel Beckett, "The Lost Ones," in *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Short Prose*, ed. S. E. Gontarski (New York: Grove Press, 1995), 204.

[48] Herta Schmid, "Samuel Beckett's Play *Quad*: An Abstract Synthesis of the Theatre," *Canadian-American Slavic Studies* 22, nos. 1-4 (1988): 263-287; 286.

Wassily Kandinsky's theories of point, line, and plane structures in the visual arts.[49] Kandinsky was also dance enthusiast, who felt that "the new dancing," exemplified by Isadora Duncan, was "the only means of giving in terms of time and space the real inner meaning of motion."[50] Furthermore, he worked closely with Beckett's friend Gret Palucca, producing photographs of her body to illustrate the tenets of his visual system in his work *Point and Line to Plane* (1926) and his abstract piece "Dance Curves" (1926).[51] In one particular photograph, Palucca is shown performing a high leap, with her limbs extending out in each direction to suggest a dynamic movement across horizontal and vertical planes. Kandinsky notes that "whereas the leap formerly [in classical ballet] pointed to a straight, vertical direction, the 'modern' leap frequently forms a five-pointed plane with its five extremities – head, two feet and two hands, where the ten fingers form ten smaller points."[52] The location of Palucca's head in this leap, in line with her trunk, allows her hands and feet to form four distinct points, loosely reproducing the figure of the quincunx that Beckett reformulated throughout his work. The form of Palucca's body in this image is suggestive of vital dynamism, with her five "points" resisting the logic of gravitational pull in order to push the body upwards and outwards through space. The centre of her body, a site of core strength, gives the movement balance and stability, providing an alternative model for the "danger zone" in Beckett's *Quad* as a source of energy and propulsion, despite its apparent function as a dead centre in this play.

The figures pacing the lines of the quincunx in *Quad* are also familiar in the context of Beckett's work. With their "gowns reaching to the ground, [and] cowls hiding [their] faces" (*CDW*, 452), they are strikingly similar to *Not I*'s djellaba-clad Auditor, a figure inspired by Caravaggio's bereft Herodias. Indeed, the symbol of the quincunx had particular Salomean resonances for Beckett. Among the poems he highlighted in his copy of Robert de la Vaissière's *Anthologie Poétique du XX Siècle*

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[49] Beckett cited Kandinsky as a point of reference for his own turn "towards an abstract language" in an interview with John Gruen. See "An Interview with Samuel Beckett," *Vogue*, December, 1969, 210. Speaking of dance more specifically, Jones has identified parallels between *Quad* and Schlemmer's "Space Dance" (1929), a choreographic exploration of the relationship between the performing body and the spatial confines of the stage; see *Literature, Modernism and Dance*, 297.

[50] Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art,* trans. M. T. H. Sadler (New York: Dover Pub., 1977), 50-51.

[51] Tim Lawrence has recently shown how Kandinsky's point, line and plane structures subtly infiltrated Beckett's prose, drawing parallels between Kandinsky's theoretical writings and Beckett's essays on painters, particularly his dialogues with George Duthuit. See "Samuel Beckett's Critical Abstractions: Kandinsky, Duthuit and Visual Form," *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui* 27 (2015): 57-71.

[52] Wassily Kandinsky, *Point and Line to Plane,* trans. Howard Dearstyne and Hilla Rebay (New York: Dover Pub, 1979), 42.

(1923) was Guillaume Apollinaire's "Salomé" (1905), a provocative reimagining of the biblical narrative that situates Salome in the medieval French court.[53] Apollinaire reinvents Salome as a French princess in the throes of a terrible grief, perhaps connected to the pagan madness associated with Midsummer Night, the eve of St John the Baptist's Feast Day.[54] The following lines may well have been of particular significance to Beckett, as Apollinaire specifically connects Salome's dance to the image of the quincunx:

> Venez tous avec moi là-bas sous les quinconces
> Ne pleure pas ô joli fou du roi
> Prends cette tête au lieu de ta marotte et danse
> N'y touchez pas son front ma mère est déjà froid
>
> [Under the quincunx everyone come with me
> Weep not charming jester
> Take this head in your hands for a bauble and dance
> Touch it not mother the brow is cold][55]

The severed head of the Baptist becomes a peculiar kind of object in Apollinaire's text: Anne Hyde Greet's translation offers "bauble" for "marotte," but this word can also mean a "false head," such as the plaster head that might be used in performances of *Salomé*, or, indeed, those Yeatsian dance plays that feature severed heads. Salome's dance in this poem, like the dance performed in *Quad*, takes place along the lines of a quincunx, using Browne's symbol to give the choreography a sense of spiritual design. While it is not necessarily the case that Beckett looked to this precedent specifically for his own dramatic approach to the quincunx image or the veiled dance in *Quad*, his early reading habits and artistic interests do show that he was deeply immersed in the cultural ferment surrounding dance and literature in the early twentieth century. Beckett sustained his interest in Apollinaire over the years, translating "Zone" for Eugene Jolas and Maria McDonald's experimental journal *transition*, and informing his colleagues at Trinity College Dublin that they should be reading "Apollinaire, Breton and Crevel," rather than Valéry and Rimbaud.[56] As a dance play written for television, *Quad* reveals Beckett's ambition to work across media and art forms, an

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[53] Van Hulle and Nixon, *Samuel Beckett's Library*, 76.
[54] See Willard Bohn, "Apollinaire, Salome and the Dance of Death," *French Studies* 57, no. 4 (2003): 491-500.
[55] Guillaume Apollinaire, "Salomé," in *Alcools*, trans. Anne Hyde Greet (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1965), 91.
[56] Deirdre Bair, *Samuel Beckett: A Biography* (New York: Touchstone, 1993), 116.

ambition shared with Apollinaire, and both writers used the central motifs of the quincunx and the veiled dance to experiment with the limits of dramatic form.

Once again, the idea of the veiled dance produces fraught interplays between the dancer's creative individualism and a controlling external authority. Although Beckett's extensive stage directions, along with the apparently rigid nature of *Quad*'s performance, might appear to limit the creative input of anyone but the dramatist, this was not how Beckett perceived the play. "Apart from the basic structure it is open to discussion in all its aspects: light, colour, costume, types of percussion, tempo, etc.," Beckett wrote to Reinhart Müller-Freienfels, his collaborator in German television.[57] He even went so far as to describe *Quad* as "A collective undertaking if ever there was one."[58] As far as he was concerned, *Quad* was to be considered a collaborative enterprise: he was willing to experiment with most of the components from the colours of the costumes to the textures of the soundscape. The sound director, Konrad Körte, claimed that Beckett had a sense of how the piece should sound but no fixed understanding of how that effect might be achieved, reflecting Yeats's earlier admission that the choreographies in his plays would give him trouble because he possessed a limited understanding of dance.

One of the key elements that Beckett and the crew investigated was the presentation of the four figures. Beckett suggested that they might stage the play with the costumes "grey" and in "tatters," rather than the distinct colours initially planned.[59] His vision for the project clearly evolved at various moments, with the gowns of the figures taking on specific importance as markers of the play's failing and disintegrating conditions. Although he did experiment with the ruination and alteration of the gowns during the rehearsals for *Quad*, Beckett was not so much preoccupied with the stripping of the veiled body – a common theme in the other veiled dances explored – as he was with the stripping away and gradual reduction of the body itself. This bleaker realisation can be traced, for instance, in *Quad 2,* which presents the four grey figures progressing at a greatly slowed pace. While it is possible to read the zone at the centre of the quincunx as a type of pivot around which these bodies dance, it is also clear that the play embraces a logic of diminishing returns, as the dancers' repeated movements edge towards the crisis of an end point.

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[57] SB to Reinhart Müller-Freienfels, 30 January [1980], *Letters*, 4, 522
[58] Ibid.
[59] Beckett, *Letters*, 4, 333.

In this way, the choreographed patterns of *Quad* confer harsh requirements on the bodies of the individual dancers. These are forms of control and depersonalisation Beckett insisted upon in other works. Discussing the performance style he sought in *What Where* (1983), he made clear stipulations: "Attitudes and movement strictly identical. Speech mechanical and colourless. Marionettes. No 'interpretation'. A balletistic approach. Bodily control the most important requirement as in *Quad* and *Nacht u. Träume*[.]"[60] In this context, the idea of dance corresponds to an erosion of choice and independence in performance, fully subjecting the actor to the directions of playwright and text. As Anthony Paraskeva has shown, voices of "external depersonalised directorial authority" resound alongside mechanical behaviours in Beckett's plays, although such "rigid form," as in the marionette theatre, often "preserves radical indeterminacy."[61] It is perhaps within the spatial and textual demarcations of Beckett's stage that performers discover another kind of creativity. Josephine Starte has described the "sensation of freedom achieved through compliance with fastidious instruction" in dance, referring to Robbie Meredith's reflection on Beckett's partnership with various actors: "Steps in any dance are finely choreographed, but the best dancers use these to find a freedom of expression and gesture, in which their skills and personality thrive."[62] Indeed, for Piotr Woycicki, *Quad*'s "pure formalism is unachievable in live performance since the live bodies resist the imposition of such rigid formal structures."[63] It is the apparent inflexibility of the work that, somewhat paradoxically, serves to highlight the tensions between formal abstraction and the individualism of the performing body, which cannot be neatly integrated into such a coldly rigorous system.

This was, it seems, the case for Billie Whitelaw, who described how, in the rehearsals for *Footfalls*, Beckett "would endlessly move [her] arms and [her] head in a certain way […] If it didn't feel right he would correct the pose."[64] Relinquishing control of her body did not, according to Whitelaw, "restrict [her] at all. More and more I felt that my movements were being choreographed." These motions, she recalls, "started to feel like a dance."[65] The moments of imbalance inherent within

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[60] SB to Reinhart Müller-Freienfels, 1 January 1984, *Letters*, 4, 631-2
[61] Paraskeva, "Beckett, Biomechanics,"177.
[62] Josephine Starte, "Beckett's Dances," *Journal of Beckett Studies* 23, no. 2 (2014): 181; Robbie Meredith, "Acting for Mr Beckett," *Fortnight* 443 (2006): 17-18.
[63] Piotr Woycicki, "'Mathematical Aesthetic' as a Strategy for Performance: A Vector Analysis of Samuel Beckett's Quad," *Journal of Beckett Studies* 21, no. 2 (2012): 144.
[64] Whitelaw, *Who He?*, 144.
[65] Ibid., 144-45.

this kind of creative relationship are reflected in the content of Beckett's plays, which often turn to questions of subjugation and cruel dominance through their presentation of tightly organised systems of control. Moreover, as Preston observes with reference to Eve Sedgwick's writing on pedagogy, learning often occurs in "the middle ranges of agency," and the performance of an "impersonal self" (as demanded by the Nō theatre) might open up new kinds of collaborative work through bodily submission.[66] The partnership between dancer and director, to which Beckett turned continuously, provided a crucial model for this kind of enquiry, manifesting in productive but unresolved tensions between the textual and corporeal elements of his work.

Tearing the Veil: Beckett's Dancing Texts

Dance is central to Beckett's drama, and the origins of this preoccupation can be charted back through his early prose and encounters with dancers in the 1920s and 30s. The sense that there is an underlying complicity between his work and choreography is implicit in the popular misquote: "Dance first, think later. It's the natural order."[67] Although this mangled compression of a passage in *Waiting for Godot* (1953) is tonally at odds with the play it invokes, the idea that movement might precede thought for Beckett does bear relevance to the late drama, where "pacing" is "essence" and the words "excipient."[68] As this coda has suggested, reading Beckett's textual choreographies through Salome opens up fruitful imaginative interplays between his texts and other incarnations of this figure in literature and dance, whose traces we can detect across Beckett's corpus, as well as in his correspondence and reading patterns. Beckett's plays consistently mark the slippages between the authorial presences of playwright and dancer – moments of imbalance, and of equilibrium, which have emerged so often in the case studies I have explored in this thesis. His enduring interest in the vexed relationship between the rhythms of dance and severed, incomplete, or immobile bodies shows how the visual register of Salome's story mutated into a plethora of forms in the twentieth century, despite her apparently diminishing popularity as a literary theme.

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[66] Preston, *Learning to Kneel*, 16-17. See also Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

[67] This misquotation has appeared in many contexts. See Mansell, "Describing Arabesques," 102.

[68] Beckett, quoted in Whitelaw, *Who He?,* 139.

Salome's moving veils, a point of fixation for her earlier interpreters, might also be glimpsed in Beckett's ruminations on the reasons for his shift to writing in French, famously distilled in his 1937 letter to Axel Kaun: "more and more my language appears to me like a veil which one has to tear apart in order to get to those things (or the nothingness) lying behind it."[69] As we have seen in the case of Yeats, the veil has long served as an appropriate metaphor for the processes of revelation and concealment thought to underpin literary creation. Beckett was influenced by the philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer, who described the "veil of Maya," an important concept in Hindu and Buddhist thought, as a vital symbol in *The World as Will and Representation* (1818), which Beckett read in 1930.[70] For Schopenhauer, the veil of Maya conceals the "inner nature of things, which is one," instead presenting "phenomena as separated, detached, innumerable, very different, and indeed opposed."[71] Beckett's anxiety about the possible "nothingness" lurking behind such a veil, despite the contradictory impulses and appearances of the visible world, reflects the doubt that has underpinned Salome's body since Wilde supplemented her "invisible dance" with veils. So often, those spectators who eagerly anticipated Salome's unveiling have been left confused, disappointed, and dismayed by a dance that has revealed "nothing," or, indeed, shown them only their own unfulfilled longings. For Beckett, the veiled body of the dancer might constitute something like the veiled body of the text: the necessary artifice that separates the writer from his or her work, much as the dancer retreats from the gaze of the spectator to disrupt his sense of control over her body. It is in such spaces of fertile uncertainty that the dancer authors the performance, and it was in the spaces between words and gestures that Beckett's performers made their bodies dance.

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[69] SB to Axel Kaun, 9 July [1937], in *Letters*, 1, 518.

[70] For more on SB and Schopenhauer, see Steven J. Rosen, *Samuel Beckett and the Pessimistic Tradition* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1976); Ulrich Pothast, *The Metaphysical Vision: Arthur Schopenhauer's Philosophy of Art and Life and Samuel Beckett's Own Way to Make Use of It* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008).

[71] Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1, trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1969), 352.

Conclusion

In the past year, I have seen Salome dance live on three occasions. The first was a staging of Wilde's *Salomé* at the RSC in Stratford-upon-Avon. This production commemorated fifty years since the partial decriminalisation of homosexuality in England and Wales, and Salome was played by a young male actor (Matthew Tennyson), whose desire for Iokanaan (Gavin Fowler) and seduction of Herod (Matthew Pidgeon) stressed the play's homoeroticism. Wilde's memory was undoubtedly at stake here, as well as the broader history of LGBTQ rights in the UK. Director Owen Horsley embraced the camp glamour and sexual ambiguities suggested by Wilde's dramatic vision, thereby engaging in acts of serious political reflection through the modes of aesthetic choice. Herod's palace was reimagined as a fetish chamber, populated by actors in bondage and feathers; their bare skin shimmering and painted gold.[1] During the dance scene, Salome – described by Horsley as a "taboo" who "transgresses the boundaries of both male and female sexuality" – writhes and jerks to music by the queer artist Perfume Genius, finally casting off a thin veil to disclose the unequivocal truth of her (his) anatomy.[2] This revelation, rather than deepening the enigma of the gendered body in *Salomé*, asserts the dominance of male forms and desires in this particular version, forcefully ousting the imagined figure of the woman with phallic clarity.

In a very different production, the South African playwright Yaël Farber directed her own adaptation of the myth in a one-act *Salome* at London's National Theatre. Borrowing heady elements from Wilde's incantatory dialogue, Farber restaged the biblical narrative as a reclaiming of cultures disempowered under colonial rule. According to Farber, her actors were deliberately recruited from countries divided along political fissures – Ireland; Syria; Israel; Palestine – in order to elucidate the simmering contexts of occupation and displacement that frame the biblical text.[3] Salome (Isabella Nefar) is a revolutionary, inspired to action by the prophetic utterances of an Arabic-speaking Iokanaan (Ramzi Choukair), whose execution here operates as a catalyst for revolt against Roman rule in Judea.[4] Far removed from the

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[1] *Salomé* by Oscar Wilde, dir. Owen Horsley, Swan Theatre, RSC, Stratford-upon-Avon, July 12, 2017.
[2] "Q & A with Salomé Director Owen Horsley," Royal Shakespeare Company (website), accessed November 10, 2017, https://www.rsc.org.uk/news/archive/q-a-with-salome-director-owen-horsley.
[3] Yaël Farber in conversation with Kate Bassett, National Theatre, London, July 14, 2017.
[4] *Salome* by Yaël Farber, dir. Yaël Farber, National Theatre, London, July 14, 2017.

angular gyrations and thrusting favoured in the choreography for the RSC production, Salome's dance is performed by Nefar in a manner that strikingly recalls Loïe Fuller. Standing atop Herod's table, Nefar wields seven enormous veils, which she pulls and twists with her hands, creating luminous undulations in materials that glow beneath the stage lamps. From the perspective of the audience, Salome's body is dwarfed by her billowing silks – like Fuller, she renders her physical form difficult to locate amongst the veils that she controls. Powerfully claiming the Tetrarch's royal table as her dance floor, this Salome demonstrates her authorial capacities through the dance, governing the symbolic vocabulary of the stage with her body.

Finally, in a recent production of Strauss's *Salome* at London's Royal Opera House, soprano Malin Byström takes up the challenge of performing Salome's dance, rather than leaving this element of the performance to a trained professional.[5] An innovative interpretation of the dance scene accentuates the mobile properties of the stage itself, as the existing set – a network of high walls, raised levels, and spiral staircases – moves swiftly offstage, only to be replaced by itinerant walls and props that traverse the boards with Salome's body. Framed by looming screen projections of unzipped bodices and bare skin, Salome and Herod move through a sequence of rooms in an oneiric choreographing of both bodies and stage technology. The unfixable qualities of the theatrical space mirror the elusive movements of the dancing Salome, evoking Yeats's and Edward Gordon Craig's deep preoccupation with the dynamic attributes of the material stage world. These contemporary retellings of Salome's story continuously return to the practical and conceptual concerns this thesis has traced across literary and choreographic engagements with Salome and her dance. The body of the dancer remains a site of erotic uncertainty and volatile impulses, yet crucially endures as the dramatic nexus of this endlessly seductive myth. Salome communicates with and through her dancing body, not only bewitching Herod and his company but also the aesthetic and formal properties of language and theatrical space.

In this thesis, I have argued for a reading of Salome that is more open to the prospect of choreographic creativity and corporeal work than has typically been warranted in academic accounts of this theme. While many scholars have detailed the rampant misogyny undoubtedly present in some nineteenth- and twentieth-century

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[5] *Salome*, music by Richard Strauss, libretto by Oscar Wilde and Hedwig Lachmann, dir. David McVicar, Royal Opera House, London, January 5, 2018.

treatments of Salome, others have advanced interpretations that emphasise her sexual power and erotic freedom, discovering a model for feminist agitation in the teasing permutations of her veils. This has proven to be particularly true in the case of historical dance performances that permitted women the opportunity to present Salome on their own terms, as shown most famously by the example of Maud Allan. Building on extant scholarship, I have proposed that Salome's dance emerges across a range of texts, images, and performances as the source of a different kind of communication, developing a corporeal aesthetic in these works through the physical language of the dancing body. Rather than instilling a clear division between literary and choreographic renderings of this subject – as other critics have often done – I have combined close textual interpretation with dance histories and film analysis to demonstrate the ways in which Salome's dance was imaginatively preserved as a site of authorial possibility for the body of the dancer, frequently encouraging partnerships between playwrights and performers.

I have further shown the many ways in which the dancing Salome and the severed head she covets are deeply engrained in the visual index demarcating modernism's complex engagements with the body. Scholarly debates in this field have repeatedly returned to the apparent opposition between the broken, abject, and displaced corporeal forms that appear everywhere in this period – from Surrealist cinema to Beckett's theatre – and the rhythmic, fluid, dynamic bodies that emerge in parallel (from Surrealist cinema to Beckett's theatre). This disconcerting tension has been stimulated by conflicted theoretical constructions of the body's wholeness, on the one hand, and its fragmented or partial nature on the other. As the case studies I have explored suggest, these apparently divorced approaches to bodily forms can exist in concert; indeed, they are interconnected. Salome's dance depends upon the Baptist's execution, and his decollation is the result of her dance. The myth of Salome unites the dancer with her severed head – the graceful, moving body with the static part – and this image acts as a synecdoche for a whole range of creative encounters with modern bodies, perhaps explaining its extraordinary appeal for the writers and dancers I have discussed, and many of their contemporaries.

This has by no means been an exhaustive study of Salome, or of the choreographic imagination that developed in writing and filmmaking during this period. Further work in this area might look more specifically at the historical entanglements of dance and Irish modernism, building on the case studies I have

considered in this thesis. Dance does seem to hold a particular creative potency for late nineteenth- and twentieth-century Irish writers, whose peripatetic engagements with European aesthetic movements stimulated the cultural and intellectual transmissions previously mapped by scholars including Katharine Worth and Michael McAteer. Salome is clearly a muse for Wilde and Yeats, and an important spectral presence for Beckett, but she also appears at critical moments in Joyce's work – in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man,* for instance. Indeed, Salome's supposedly inarticulable performance has a long history in Irish writing, as I have suggested at points throughout this project. The eleventh-century infancy gospel of the Irish manuscript *Leabhar breac*, a translation of St. Jerome's Vulgate, struggles to find the correct Irish term for dance in its account of the Baptist's beheading, resorting to the phrases *léimneach* ("jumping"), *opaireacht* ("antics") and *cleasaigheacht* ("acrobatics") to describe Salome's movements.[6] In this medieval work, as in many of its other literary manifestations, Salome's invisible dance manifests as a textual aporia.

A future project might also delve further into Salome's afterlives in twentieth-century film. A great number of silent film adaptations of Wilde and of the Salome narrative remain largely unexplored and might be newly situated in relation to the institutional pressures of their local industries as well as the international cultures of modernism. Looking further forward, Dierkes-Thrun has led critical efforts to trace Wilde's influence on popular culture in the later decades of the twentieth century, presenting a complex picture of sex-positive and queer adoptions of both Wilde and his Salome in films including Ken Russell's *Salome's Last Dance* (1988) and Suri Krishnamma's *A Man of No Importance* (1994).[7] In other cases, Rita Hayworth's performance in *Salome* (1953) demonstrates this figure's sustained allure for Hollywood film actors and directors, long after the frenzied phenomenon of Salomania reached its heights. Billy Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard* (1950) may align Salome's story with the decline of the black and white film – and its faded female star, Norma Desmond (Gloria Swanson) – but hers was still a face that, by the end of Wilder's film, demanded and secured an infamous close-up.

Salome has proven to be a figure of extraordinary imaginative complexity in writing, dance, and film of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the early

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[6] Deirdre Mulrooney discusses these etymological slippages in *Irish Moves: An Illustrated History of Dance and Physical Theatre in Ireland* (Dublin: The Liffey Press, 2006), 33-34. For a translation see Robert Atkinson, *The Passions and the Homilies from Leabhar Breac* (Dublin: Hodges, Figgis & Co., 1887).
[7] Dierkes-Thrun, *Salome's Modernity*, 161-196.

Decadent and Symbolist visions I considered, Salome's dancing body was inscribed with fantasies of oriental sensuality, eastern mysticism, and dangerous womanhood emblematised by the popular trope of the *femme fatale*. Wilde drew on and complicated these precursors, making the dance of the seven veils a site of elliptical textuality and choreographic potential, crucially imagining a place for the female body as a creative force. His *Salomé* reflected and shaped a prevalent fascination with the body of the dancing woman, which continued to influence modernist experiments in literary form and theatre practice, as well as developments in modern dance. "What poet […] would venture to separate [a beautiful woman] from her costume?" asks Baudelaire in "The Painter of Modern Life," declaring woman to be "a general harmony, not only in her bearing and the way in which she moves and walks, but also in the muslins, the gauzes, the vast, iridescent clouds of stuff in which she envelops herself."[8] It was in these veils, silks, and gauzes – keepers of woman's artifice – that Loïe Fuller discovered her capacity for image-making, using her body to alter the symbolic functions of her materials and expand the limits of her corporeal presence. It is the intelligent body of the dancing woman that writers often displaced in their invocations of Salome, and this is the body I have sought to foreground on alternative terms, showing how Salome's veils bridged and demarcated the space between textual and bodily forms, and enabled the creative work of dancers across a range of disciplines and aesthetic contexts.

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[8] Baudelaire, "The Painter of Modern Life," 30.

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