

Salomé: A Tragedy in One Act by Oscar Wilde. Trans. by Joseph Donohue and illus. by Barry Moser. Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 2011. \$24.95.

Salome remains the most controversial of Oscar Wilde's works. "It is an arrangement in blood and ferocity," remarked *The Times* upon its first appearance in print, "morbid, bizarre, repulsive, and very offensive in its adaptation of scriptural phraseology to situations the reverse of sacred." As the *Times* reminded readers, the play had been banned from stage performance in 1892, ostensibly on grounds of blasphemy, although the Examiner of Plays wrote privately that it was "a miracle of impudence..., half-biblical, half-pornographic."

For the past 120 years, understanding of the play has been dominated by the "pictures" (he refused to concede that they were illustrations) that Aubrey Beardsley attached to the play in 1894. Here too controversy arose from the start. Beardsley's pictures were condemned by puritans; his own publishers forced him to redraw putatively obscene designs. They were praised in the art world, but even Beardsley's admirers feared that his pictures dominated the play to its detriment – that, far from "illustrating" Wilde's play, Beardsley had used it to assert his own supremacy as an artist and aesthete.

The controversy centred on linguistic matters as much as graphic ones. Beardsley had wanted to translate the play, which had been composed and first published in French. Overruled as translator in favour of Wilde's lover, Lord Alfred Douglas, to whom the 1894 edition is dedicated, Beardsley put his animus into his illustrations, some scholars argue, caricaturing Wilde in a number of designs. As importantly, readers of the 1894 edition were aware that the play had been composed and first published in French ("translated from the French of Oscar Wilde," the title-page prominently states). Consequently, the 1894 text was doomed to be understood on its merits as a translation, overshadowed by the "original" French. Probably for this reason, Robert Ross, Wilde's literary executor, subtly and silently revised the 1894 text for the reprints of 1906 and 1912 while refusing to incorporate *any* English text of *Salome* into the *Collected Works* of 1908 (where the play was represented only by the 1893 French text). Even Wilde himself was later to castigate Douglas for the "schoolboy faults" of "your translation" – though this castigation, issued in the long prison-letter now known as *De Profundis*, and never meant to be made public, must be taken very cautiously by virtue of Wilde's animus towards Douglas at that time.

Announcing that it is "translated by Joseph Donohue" and "illustrated by Barry Moser," the latest edition of *Salome* steps boldly into these controversies. Previous to this retranslation, four others have appeared since 1957; taking their cue from the remarks Wilde himself issued from prison, each new