From Saint to Sinner:

The Demonization of Oscar Wilde's *Salomé* in Hedwig Lachmann's German Translation and in Richard Strauß's Opera

Rainer Kohlmayer

In this paper it is my objective to show how Hedwig Lachmann, the wife of the well−known anarchist writer Gustav Landauer, intervened as translator of Oscar Wilde's *Salomé* in such a decisive way as to predetermine the German reception of the play from 1900 on up to the present day.

1. Wilde's French Play *Salomé*

Oscar Wilde wrote *Salomé* in French while in Paris in November and December of 1891. It was a bold attempt to break away from the paradigm of England's cultural tradition and to return to the Greek sources of European art. For Wilde this implied three things: Verbal music, Aristotelian dramaturgy, and anti−Christianity.

In his essay *The Critic as Artist* (1890) Wilde had condemned traditional literature with its elaborate designs and advocated a return to the musical language of Greek antiquity:

"The Greeks [...] regarded writing simply as a method of chronicling. Their test was always the spoken word in its musical and metrical relations. The voice was the medium, and the ear the critic. [...] Yes: writing has done much harm to writers. We must return to the voice. That must be our test [...]" (Wilde 1987:1017).

The French language served Wilde, in a way, as a modern substitute for Greek. "To me there are only two languages in the world: French and Greek" (Ellmann 1987:352), Wilde told a French interviewer. The play *Salomé*, with its multitude of leitmotifs, refrains, alliterations, assonances, and other stylistic devices was − in Wilde's own words − "like a piece of music (Wilde 1987:922). In this respect

Salomé was quite in keeping with French Symbolist literature of the 1890's (e.g. Maeterlinck).

On the other hand, the classicist macrostructure of *Salomé*, with its Aristotelian unities and dynamic dramaturgy, was a far cryb from the static aimlessness of symbolist drama.

Wilde's aesthetic return to Greek classicism was, on a deeper level, a return to the pre−Christian sources of Europe. *Salomé* was written as a heathen act of deconstruction directed against the conventional, in the sense of Puritan, interpretation of the Bible. It is a Nietzschean work of art in that it propagates a profound revaluation of traditional values. Wilde's message might be summed up briefly as follows: Christianity befell the ancient world as a veritable disaster.

Wilde reinterprets the Biblical story of John the Baptist and Salome in such a way that it is no longer the Christian saint who falls prey to the dancer Salome or her mother Herodias but, rather, it is Salome who is destroyed by John the Baptist.

Wilde portrays the arrival of Christianity in the ancient world as an apocalyptic catastrophe. Thus, Jochanaan (as John the Baptist is called in Wilde's play) announces triumphantly:

Les centaures se sont cachés dans les rivières, et les sirènes ont quittés les rivières et couchent sous les feuilles dans les forêts (Wilde 1908:16).

For the centaurs and sirens, the mythical symbols of the male and female union of humans and animals, the beginning of Christianity ushered in the panic of the apocalypse. The destruction of ambiguities, of the unity of body and soul, of the polyphony of antiquity, now continues resolutely in the liquidation of Salome. It is important to realize that the initiative for and even the exact method of Salome's execution at the end of the play stems from Jochanaan. King Herod merely carries out the brutal demands for a lynching that Jochanaan had hurled at Salome from his prison, claiming his curses were the pronouncement of divine judgement:

Voici ce que dit le Seigneur Dieu. Faites venir contre elle une multitude d'hommes. Que le peuple prenne des pierres et la lapide... [...]. Que les capitaines de guerre la percent de leurs épées, qu'ils l'écrasent sous leurs boucliers. [...] et que toutes les femmes apprendront à ne pas imiter les abominations de celle−la (Wilde 1908:50f.).

Just as Jochanaan demands, at the end, Salome is literally crushed under the shields of the soldiers: "Les soldats s'élancent et écrasent sous leurs boucliers Salomé [...] (Wilde 1908:82) − a striking symbolic image of collective lynch law, anticipating phenomena such as the witch−hunting of the Middle Ages.

In view of Jochanaan's brutish call for Salome's murder, her demand to have him beheaded becomes not only an act of revenge but also self−defence.

The play is, in one respect, an extremely succinct biography of Salome, who appears on stage as an innocent child full of questions and a thirst for knowledge, whose sudden love for Jochanaan is callously rejected and cursed, who takes revenge and dies an incredible death of passion, while kissing Jochanaan's severed head. Salome's life is the rejection of self−denial; holding on to love at all costs is her anarchic, even absurd act of rebellion and vitality. Salome's monologue of love ends with the words:

"[...] le mystère de l'amour est plus grand que le mystère de la mort. Il ne faut regarder que l'amour" (Wilde 1908:80).

This is an unequivocal statement on the priority of love, but can also be understood as a commentary on Jochanaan's misspent life, a prophet and man who − according to this interpretation − did not truly live before his death. The allusion to the *Song of Salomon* ("l'amour est fort comme la mort", 8,6) and to the well−known Virgilian verse "omnia vincit Amor: et nos cedamus Amori" (*Bucolica*, X, 60) adds weight to Salome's words. Her biography is presented as exemplary, as a legend of a heathen martyr, a saint of the senses, so to speak.

The play *Salomé* is a refutation of the Bible. It is an ironic, anti−Christian interpretation of the great turning point of history: the ancient world of love is destroyed, and terror in the name of the Christian God begins its reign.

2. Hedwig Lachmann's Translation

For the history of the German reception of the play, it was not the original French but rather the English version that was of primary importance − a fact that had remained undiscovered until today. The French edition of the play appeared in 1893 in book form, the English translation by Lord Alfred Douglas with illustrations by Aubrey Beardsley came out in 1894. Wilde criticized this translation heavily and most likely corrected parts of it (Ellmann 1987:379−381). On the whole, the

translation only rarely does justice to the musicality of the original. Most noticeable is the archaic solemnness of intonation. Wilde's French was the language of the day; the English translation, in contrast, historicizes the work. Not only the prophet Jochanaan − which could be conceptually justified most easily − speaks using the syntax of the bible translation of 1611, the official King James version: "The Lord hath come. The son of man hath come" (Wilde 1987:555) etc., but also Salome and Herod. For example, after Salome's dance the 'French' Herod turns to the dancer in easy confidence:

Approchez, Salomé! [...] Ah! je paie bien les danseuses, moi. Toi, je te paierai bien. Je te donnerai tout ce que tu voudras. Que veux−tu, dis? (Wilde 1908:66).

In English the passage is as follows:

Come near, Salomé [...]. Ah! I pay the dancers well. I will pay thee royally. I will give thee whatsoever thy soul desireth. What wouldst thou have? Speak (Wilde 1987:570).

"[T]hee", "royally", "thy soul" etc. is reminiscent of a fairy tale removed from the present. This also applies to Salome's manner of speaking. Her everyday statement: "Viens ici. Tu a été l'ami de celui qui est mort, n'est−ce pas?" (Wilde 1908:11) becomes solemn stage rhetoric in the English: "Come hither, thou wert the friend of him who is dead, is it not so?" (Wilde 1987:573).

To Wilde himself, Beardsley's illustrations appeared to be

too Japanese, while my play is Byzantine. [...] My Salome is a mystic, the sister of Salammbo, a Sainte Thérèse who worships the moon; dear Aubrey's designs are like the naughty scribbles a precocious schoolboy makes on the margins of his copybook (Jullian 1969:218).

Beardsley's sketches had and have still today a strong influence on the stage reception of *Salomé*. Salome's costumes and posture are often designed in imitation of Beardsley's drawings.

Apparently without Wilde's knowledge, the play was published in the June 1900 edition of the art magazine *Wiener Rundschau* under the title *Salome. Tragödie in einem Aufzug von Oscar Wilde (London). Deutsch von Hedwig Lachmann. Mit Zeichnungen von Beardsley*. This is the translation which set a precedent for the whole German reception, including the opera by Strauß, and was reprinted time and again. The place reference on the title page, *Oscar Wilde (London)*, was probably intended to be a discrete indication of the fact that Lachmann's translation was based on the English version of the play. Later editions omitted such allusions. The most recent Reclam edition (1990) asserts explicitly and incorrectly: "Aus dem Französischen übersetzt von Hedwig Lachmann."

Obviously, Lachmann followed the English text from beginning to end; however, she must have used a partially corrected English version or the French text as a reference, as several lexical errors in the English translation were corrected.

Hedwig Lachmann (1865−1918) deserves the fame critics have bestowed upon her since her translation appeared. Her text sounds like a powerful German original; since it follows the English text rather closely, it is, on the whole, rougher and more solemn than the French, but does not imitate the archaizing, historicizing fairy−tale style of the English version. Lachmann chooses an elevated form of contemporary spoken German that is dramatically intensified through variation, compounding and a dynamic rhythm. Lachmann does not strive to recreate the soft impressionistic music inherent to the French original. The lexical variation is greater than in Wilde's original and strives for more powerful rhetorical effects. Jochanaan's cistern prison is referred to as "très malsain" (Wilde 1908:12) and "very unhealthy" (Wilde 1987:554) in the French and English, whereas it becomes "ein mörderischer Ort zum Wohnen" (Wilde 1900:193) in the German; "grands corps" (Wilde 1908:24), i.e. "mighty bodies" (Wilde 1987:537), becomes "Leiber wie von Riesen" (Wilde 1900:195); for "battement d'ailes gigantesques" (Wilde 1908:39), i.e. "beating of vast wings" (Wilde 1987:562), Lachmann selects the acoustically and rhythmically more impressive "Rauschen von mächtigen Flügeln" (Wilde 1900:199). Towards the end of the play, Lachmann intensifies emotions even more: Herodias' accusation "Pourquoi la regardez−vous toujours?" (Wilde 1908:40), i.e. "Why are you always gazing at her?" (Wilde 1987:562), becomes "Warum stierst du sie immer an?" (Wilde 1900:200); Angst haben (Wilde 1908:53, 81) becomes "erzittern" (Wilde 1900:203, 212); "ma passion" (Wilde 1908:80), i.e. "my passion" (Wilde 1987:574), becomes "dies brünstige Begehren" (Wilde 1900:210).

Lachmann makes generous use of the specifically German possibility of forming compounds in order to create dozens of new words: "Bernstein−Augen", "Sündenbecher", "Hycinthgesteine", "Schlangenknoten", "Scharlachband", "Granatapfelblüten" etc. (Wilde 1900:195, 197). This dynamic use of language has

a magnificent rhetorical effect in the monologue Salome delivers while holding Jochanaan's head:

Und deine Zunge, die wie eine rothe, giftsprühende Schlange war, sie bewegt sich nicht mehr, [...] diese Scharlachnatter, die ihren Geifer auf mich spie (Wilde 1900:210).

With regard to the deficiencies of Lachmann's translation, at least three items must be noted or criticized, of which the first has to do with the gender of "la lune" and "der Mond". The French (as the English) allows a smooth transition to the female personification of the moon; Lachmann's German text employs various aids such as "Mondscheibe" or "Ist es nicht ein seltsames Bild? Es sieht aus wie ein wahnsinniges Weib [...]" etc. (Wilde 1900:191, 198). Nor did Lachmann take into account the differentiated forms of address that are revealing with regard to the relationships between the characters, which can be explained by the influence of the English version. In the French text, there are subtle distinctions that could have been incorporated into the German. For example, Salome addresses only Jochanaan with his name and the intimate form "tu" from beginning to end; she keeps all other characters at a distance. Finally, Lachmann destroys the parallel symbolism of the centaurs and sirens who hide in the rivers and in the forest: She turns the sirens into "Nymphen", who lie "unter den Blättern des Waldes begraben" (Wilde 1900:193), which no longer conveys the same impression of flight and the inversion of the ancient order of nature. In Wilde's original, the world of antiquity is by no means "begraben", but rather continues to live on under the surface.

In addition, there are several important interventions on the part of the translator that directly influenced the productions of the play and Strauß' opera. In the French text, Salome enters the stage more childlike, in the German more aware of her erotic appeal. First, Salome's appearance in the French text:

Je ne resterai pas. Je ne peux pas rester. Pourquoi le tétrarque me regarde−t−il toujours avec ses yeux de taupe sous ses paupières tremblantes?... C'est étrange que le mari de ma mère me regarde comme cela. Je ne sais pas ce que cela veut dire... Au fait, si, je le sais (Wilde 1908:14).[1]

Salome's manner of speaking is slightly lyrical due to rhythm, assonances, and alliterations. The two signs for pauses (marked by dots) are also important. Merely

a child, Salome is confronted with Herod's behaviour, which puzzles and irritates her; she describes it with the somewhat childlike image of a mole and does not seem to understand or seems to suppress the intentions guiding him, until she hesitatingly admits after a pause that "eigentlich, ja" she does indeed know what his behaviour means. Lachmann's text:

Ich will nicht bleiben. Ich kann nicht bleiben. Warum sieht mich der Tetrarch fortwährend so an mit seinen Maulwurfs−Augen unter den zuckenden Lidern? Es ist seltsam, dass der Mann meiner Mutter mich so ansieht. Ich weiß nicht, was es heißen soll. In Wahrheit − ich weiß es nur zu gut (Wilde 1900:193).

This Salome is more deliberate and purposeful; the "Ich will" in the first sentence, which Lachmann takes from the English (future tense) is the first indication; the two pauses in the original French version are also missing in the English, hence also in Lachmann's text. Lachmann's Salome is clearly aware of her erotic attraction, the reason why Herod looks at her the way he does. Nor does she ask herself what this means, but rather "was es heißen soll", i.e. what is intended by it; and Salome's knowledge is stressed emphatically: "In Wahrheit − ich weiß es nur zu gut".

Almost in slow motion, Wilde portrays her development from a child to a young woman growing aware of her sexuality during her first entrance; Lachmann, in contrast, has a fully−fledged *femme fatale* appear on stage.

Salome's heightened erotic awareness is accompanied by a certain exculpation of Jochanaan and Herod. In the French (and in the English translation as well) Jochanaan calls for Salome's execution after their confrontation by *ordering* her to be stoned, stabbed and crushed to death (Wilde 1908:51); in Lachmann's text, however, he merely *predicts* these different ways of dying:

Die Kriegshauptleute werden sie mit ihren Schwertern durchbohren, sie werden sie unter ihren Schilden zermalmen (Wilde 1900:202).[2]

Through this translation of Jochanaan's demand as a mere prophecy, he is no longer personally involved in Salome's execution. Herod makes the decision to have her put to death alone; it is not recognizable that he is merely executing the

orders Jochanaan had given before his own death, or that, since that moment, Herod seems to speak with the dead prophet's voice.

In her book on Wilde, published in 1905, Hedwig Lachmann revealed in a ten−page narrative of the play the psychological drama that, as a subtext, constitutes the basis of the translator's mise−en−scène. She speaks of "elementarer Wildheit" (Lachmann 1905:39), of

grosse Typen von singulärer Art [...]. Die Charaktere sind einfach, stark, auf e i n Gesetz, gleichsam auf eine Formel gebracht: den unbändigen, durch kein Verstandesmoment geschwächten und gehemmten Eigentrieb des Individuums. [...] Salome ist die willensstarke, unzerspaltene Natur, deren Lebensenergien im vollen Einklang mit der Größe ihres Schicksals und ihres Verbrechens sind (Lachmann 1905:47).

At the end, due to Herod,

[wird] dem Verbrecherischen im Drama ein Mass gesetzt, er repräsentiert gleichsam die Grenzen der Menschlichkeit. Und mit einer wahrhaft grossen Bewegung löst er sich in einem Moment von all dem Ungeheuerlichen, das um ihn vorgeht, vollkommen ab und erhebt sich zur selbstsicheren Persönlichkeit, indem er Salome das Todesurteil spricht (Lachmann 1905:49).

As becomes apparent, Lachmann focuses solely on Salome's crime, not on Jochanaan's verbal destruction of her, nor on his murderous appeal for a lynching, nor on Herod's function as a proxy, nor on Salome's final declaration of love. In this context, it is, I believe, significant that Lachmann simply drops Salome's final sentence "Il ne faut regarder que l'amour" (Wilde 1908:80), i.e. Love only should one consider (Wilde 1987:574). It is the only sentence in the text that Lachmann does not translate; she probably did not think this modest statement was suitable for the magnificent subtext she imagined.

The psychological drama, the "tierhafte Wildheit Salomes" (Lachmann 1905:48), underlying Lachmann's translation, projects a grandiose, anarchic vitality into this character: the eruption and taming of 'woman' as natural force.

The dialectic relationship between Jochanaan and Salome does not come to her mind. In and since Lachmann, as Jochanaan does not call for lynch law with regard to Salome, Jochanaan embodies solely the passive purity of a Christian prophet detached from the world, so that, for the theatrical reception of the characters as well, the simple dichotomy of whore and saint had to impose itself. In the words of an early theatre critic:

Der Täufer fällt der Gier eines Mädchens von dirnenhaften Instinkten zum Opfer [...]. Salome fällt als Opfer ihrer Gier [...] (Qtd. in Jaron et al. 1986:525).

3. The Theatrical and Musical Reception of Lachmann's Text

Lachmann's version experienced a sensational success on November 15, 1902, in Berlin, in a private production at Max Reinhardt's *Kleines Theater*. All of the leading critics from all over Germany were invited, in addition to writers, artists and musicians such as Stefan George and Richard Strauß. In the role of Salome, Gertrud Eysoldt projected the combination of "Weib und Tigerin" that a critic had believed to have recognized in Beardsley's book illustrations for Lachmann's translation as early as 1900 (Becker 1901/02:203). Almost all critics agreed that Gertrud Eysoldt brought the anarchic, animal traits of Salome to life grandly, it being evident that, in particular, Lachmann's text, i.e. subtext, played to Eysoldt's demonic style of acting. Thus, the critic of *Vorwärts* describes Salome's first entrance as follows:

Langsam, in leisem Selbstgespräch voll lüstern−listiger Gedanken schleicht Salome aus dem Festsaal herbei. Es kitzelt sie, daß Herodes, der Mutter Gemahl, mit verliebten Augen an ihr, der Tochter hängt (Schmidt 1902).

Similarly, Paul Block mentions Salome's "frühreife Jugend" and that Salome ahnungsvoll nach Erfüllung wilder Begierden lechzt. Sie weiß, daß der Stiefvater sie mit heißen Blicken anschaut (Block 1902).

The development of Wilde's *Salomé* from the French original into English, via Beardsley's drawings, Lachmann's translation, Reinhardt's production, i.e. Eysoldt's acting, shows a process of increasing radicalization and brutalization of the character of Salome, who is removed from the historical context of early

Christianity and shaped with increasing clarity into an icon of eruptive sexuality.

This development reaches a peak in Richard Strauß' opera, which was premiered on December 9, 1905, in Dresden with sensational success (39 curtain calls) and since then has been part of the repertoire of the leading opera houses of the world. Initially, Strauß had wanted to have a libretto written by Anton Lindner, the music critic who had published Lachmann's translation of *Salomé* in 1900. On April 30, 1902, however, the premiere of Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*, which received much attention in Paris, took place. This opera was a novelty due to the fact that Debussy had set Maeterlinck's prose text to music without the aid of a librettist. The success of this first 'literary opera' in the modern sense probably led Strauß to do without the customary libretto and set Lachmann's text to music directly as well, assuming incorrectly, however, that Wilde's French original had been "translated literally by Ms. Lachmann," as he had written to his publisher on July 5, 1905 (Qtd. in King et al. 1991:75).

Strauß did shorten the text almost by half, but in his composition he followed the melodic and rhythmic phrasing of Lachmann's text exactly, true to the principle adopted from Wagner that the melody must emerge from the word. The dynamic style and all the other changes written into the translation by Lachmann, or which were already present in the English text, thus constituted a verbal programme that inevitably influenced the creative process of composing. For example, Strauß follows the rhythm of Lachmann's opening sentence exactly, with the strong initial accent on the word "schön": "Wie *schön* ist die Prinzessin Salome heute Nacht!". The translator had followed the English version literally, while the French original had placed the main stress at the end: "Comme la princesse Salomé est belle ce soir!" (Wilde 1908:5). For Strauß, it was also a matter of course that the root syllable stress of the individual words be respected. Hence, he wrote to Romain Rolland concerning the composition of Salome:

Im 4/4 ist jedes erste und dritte Viertel fast stets notwendig ein Accent, dem nur die Wurzelsilbe jedes Wortes anvertraut werden kann. Seit Wagner natürlich! Vorher nahm man es nicht so genau, wenn nur die Melodie schön war (Qtd. in King et al. 1991:79).

Lachmann's interpretation was heightened and transformed by Strauß into a monumental world of sound by an orchestra consisting of more than one hundred musicians, a work which suggestively evokes the "mental underworld" (Schmidgall 1977:281) of the main characters. Jochanaan, however, whom Strauß despised

(Del Mar 1962/I:250), must make do without a subconscious. Alfred Kerr's ridicule that, in Strauß, Jochanaan had become fast ein Kreuzritter mit Marschmotiv; ein Gottesmann in B−Dur, ein deutscher Jochanaan; im Kern ein blonder Prophet (Kerr 1954:271) must be passed on to Hedwig Lachmann, who had paved the way for Jochanaan's musical sanctification.

Through his condensing of the text, musical commentary and symphonic interludes (Mahling 1991:91f), Strauß focused attention even more on Salome's wildness as a *femme fatale* than Lachmann had. For example, Salome's first − 'childlike' − monologue is truncated to a few seconds, while the pause before her first meeting with Jochanaan or her rising thoughts of revenge after Jochanaan's maledictions are expounded upon with strikingly forceful music.

Six months after the Dresden premiere, Strauß began working on a French version of his opera. He did not, however, wish to have his libretto translated, but preferred to replace Lachmann's text with Wilde's French original, assuming naively that Hedwig Lachmann's "literal" translation would be a quantité négligeable that had not left any traces on his musical interpretation. His correspondence with Romain Rolland on this topic is not devoid of a comic element; for example, Strauß criticizes Debussy's *post*−Wagnerian score of *Pelléas*, which Rolland had recommended to him as an aid in learning the technique of French phrasing, because of its lack of agreement between the word stress and musical accent (Strauss/Rolland 1951:44). For these comments, he is in turn rebuked by Rolland:

Vous êtes trop orgueilleux en ce moment, en Allemagne. Vous croyez tout comprendre, et vous ne vous donnez aucune peine pour comprendre. Tant pis pour vous, si vous ne nous comprenez pas! (Strauss/Rolland 1951:47).

Strauß was willing to learn, and let Romain Rolland teach him the differences between German and French stress and phrasing. After three months of hard work, he had adapted all of the phrasing of the voice lines to Wilde's French text, and Romain Rolland corrected the score for him. The changes in the composition that, for example, were necessary to transform sentences such as "Wie schön ist die Prinzessin Salome heute Nacht!" back into "Comme la princesse Salomé est belle ce soir!" were considerable.

Strauß's 'original version' in French, however, was not able to establish itself. In 1909, he had Lachmann's text translated back into the French. Singers performing internationally then only had to relearn the French text and not the whole voice

part. It was only in 1989/90 that Strauß' and Rolland's French version was taken out of the drawer and performed at the *Opéra de Lyon*. The most recent French production at the Opéra de Paris−Bastille in the spring of 1994, however, uses Lachmann's German text once again.

In summary, it can be stated that Hedwig Lachmann played a decisive role in the reception of *Salome* in German by transforming Wilde's French symbolist−impressionist "piece of music" (Wilde 1987:922) into a pre−expressionist drama.

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1 I will not stay. I cannot stay. Why does the Tetrarch look at me all the while with his moles eyes under his shaking eyelids? It is strange that the husband of my mother looks at me like that. I know not what it means. In truth, yes I know it (Wilde 1987:555).

2 Let the war captains pierce her with their swords, let them crush her beneath their shields