

Introduction

Oscar Wilde's 1891 symbolist tragedy *Salomé* has had a rich afterlife in literature, opera, dance, film, and popular culture. Even though the literature and art of the European fin de siècle produced many treatments of the famous biblical story of Salome and Saint John the Baptist, virtually every major version in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has been some creative adaptation of or critical reaction against Wilde's *Salomé*, with its infamous Dance of the Seven Veils and Salomé's shocking final love monologue and kiss to the bloody, severed head of John the Baptist. For a work banned from the English stage by the theater censor before it was even produced, a play whose author remained intensely controversial for several decades after his notorious 1895 trials, this is a curious legacy. Why was it specifically Wilde's play, among the many provocative literary and artistic versions of the story of Salome, that proved so popular and fascinating? Why would Wilde's conception of a sexually anarchic, aestheticized Salomé speak so importantly to artists and audiences of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries? What were the historical and cultural forces that established Wilde's *Salomé* as a canonical text that, in turn, inspired more than a century's worth of creative cultural reinscriptions, adaptations, and transformations in many different genres and media? Finally, what can Western culture's ongoing fascination with figures like Salomé and Wilde tell us about ourselves and about modernity? These are the some of the central questions *Salome's Modernity* sets out to answer.

In recent years, the bulk of Wilde's work has come into the purview of modernist studies, and Wilde is often discussed as a modernist as a matter of course,¹ yet *Salomé* is often still seen as an idiosyncratic stand-alone

within the body of his work. Although Jean-Paul Riquelme's mid-1990s article "Shalom/Solomon/*Salomé*: Modernism and Wilde's Aesthetic Politics" opened up the subject of *Salomé*'s general relation to modernism, Wilde's play continues to be examined almost exclusively through the lens of fin de siècle aesthetics, historical and biographical details of Wilde's contact with the French symbolists and decadents, and aspects of gender and sexuality related to this period (e.g., the femme fatale and the dandy).² In writing his version of the popular Salome myth as a French symbolist tragedy in 1891, Oscar Wilde was undoubtedly inspired by literary-philosophical themes, concepts, and stylistic ideas in previous versions, as well as by his vast knowledge of Salome in the visual arts from the Renaissance to his present.³ But Wilde developed and exacerbated his literary and artistic influences to a point that also marks a radical departure from his predecessors. Wilde's *Salomé* defines a complex cultural tradition of ideas about aesthetics, eroticism, and transgression, a tradition that forms an important undercurrent in the development of twentieth-century modernism and modernist aesthetics.

Building on an innovative reading of *Salomé* as a forward-looking modernist text rather than a backward-looking compendium of fin de siècle themes and styles, *Salome's Modernity* argues that Wilde's play and the cultural reception of Wilde's homosexuality after his 1895 trials helped fuel and express the rise of a new type of modernist aesthetics in early twentieth-century literature and culture. I call this the "modernist aesthetics of transgression," by which I mean a replacement of traditional metaphysical, moral, and cultural belief systems with literary and artistic discourses that develop utopian erotic and aesthetic visions of individual transgression and agency. With roots in literary symbolism and decadence,⁴ *Salomé* participates in the modernist field of radical thought and aesthetic practice symbolically marked by the work of Friedrich Nietzsche, on the one hand, and Georges Bataille's and Michel Foucault's literature and philosophy of transgression, on the other. In Wilde's play, we find a unique pairing of utopian and apocalyptic elements that embody both a sense of crisis and a rebellious commitment to human agency in response to the fundamental shattering of worldly as well as transcendental authority and truth that is modernity. It develops a fierce, shocking, and alluring vision of erotic and aesthetic transgression as an ecstatic new realm for modern individualism and transformed secular humanism. Wilde directs artistic violence against the traditional institutions of moral, religious, and philosophical authority with his seductive, spectacular staging of a perverse, larger-than-life, yet deeply human Salomé. Salomé finds a way out of the misery of pitiful modern humanity by fearlessly establishing her own rules and committing to

the beauty of immanence and the violence of the human struggle, rather than seeking metaphysical transcendence. *Salomé's* modernist aesthetics of transgression bridges the nineteenth-century philosophical and artistic concerns of such writers as Mallarmé, Pater, Nietzsche, and Wilde; the modernist and postmodernist literature and philosophy of transgression (Bataille, Foucault); and late twentieth-century popular culture, which still contains many of these modernist elements. In describing these connections and developments, *Salomé's Modernity* touches on the larger relationships between discourses of erotic transgression and modernist aesthetics that underlie and support these powerful fantasies and account for their proliferation: such themes as the death of God, the rise of modern individualism, debates about the theory and practice of avant-garde art in a consumer society, and the crisis of human agency and freedom in a radically changed, secular, modern world. As an iconic rebel who makes do without religion and instead devotes herself to a secular gospel of erotic and aesthetic ecstasy, Salomé prefigures modernism's central project of transforming metaphysical sublimity into physical and artistic sublimity. In her, Wilde created a complex utopian-dystopian image of the modernist struggles with secular individualism and agency—versions of the problematic of the postmetaphysical subject of consciousness that form a central concern of cultural and philosophical modernity and its respective modernism(s).

Salomé's Modernity studies this phenomenon through a wide interdisciplinary and transnational range of Salome adaptations in literature, opera, dance, film, and popular culture from the 1860s to the 2000s and across the spectrum from high to popular culture. Accompanied by changing cultural attitudes toward Oscar Wilde's "perversity" and Salomé's paradoxical feminist-misogynist potential, these adaptations make up a rich archive of cultural fantasies of aesthetic and erotic transgression that have been negotiated and continuously reinvented via the Salome theme. In the wake of Wilde's 1895 trials, Salomé was often read as a mask for Wilde's own homosexual desires and as his aesthetic and erotic alter ego. Hence both Salomé and Wilde became fertile sites for artists' and audiences' fantasies of erotic and artistic nonconformity and icons of protest against repressive moral and social censorship in these adaptations. The play *Salomé* and its author amalgamated transgressive aesthetics, perverse sexuality, shocking blasphemy, and modern individualism, an explosive and potent mixture that fuels the creative imagination of artists and audiences to this day.

Wilde originally composed *Salomé* while staying in Paris in late 1891, and he did so in French, the language of Sarah Bernhardt, Stéphane Mallarmé,

and the circle of symbolist writers with whom he fervently wished to align himself. The surviving manuscripts of early drafts, all in French (housed at the Bodmer Library, Geneva; at Texas University; and at the Rosenbach Museum, Philadelphia), show that Wilde enlisted the linguistic help of such friends as Pierre Louÿs, Stuart Merrill, and Adolphe Retté, who commented on various drafts and corrected Wilde's few obvious Anglicisms. Talking about ideas for *Salomé* and circulating drafts at literary soirees, Wilde was already establishing a place for himself among the most interesting, innovative, and trendsetting writers and artists of his time. (The Bodmer manuscript appears to be the earliest draft; the Rosenbach manuscript bears Louÿs' interlinear comments and corrections.) As an experiment in symbolist aesthetics—and, indeed, in the French language—*Salomé* was to have become Wilde's contribution to French literature. According to Wilfrid Blunt, at a breakfast in October 1891, Wilde conceived of the play as follows: "Oscar told us he was writing a play in French to be acted in the Français. He is ambitious of being a French Academician" (*Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde* 506n1). The play would have established Wilde as the first English-speaking writer to adopt and promote symbolist aesthetics for the London literary world, "demonstrating his true cosmopolitanism but also revealing to his countrymen that they had a writer of international stature in their midst" (Bird 57).

In late June 1892, however, while London rehearsals with Sarah Bernhardt as *Salomé* were already in full swing, *Salomé* was abruptly banned by the London examiner of plays, Edward F. Smyth Pigott, whom Shaw posthumously described as "a walking compendium of vulgar insular prejudice" (*Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde* 98n1). Pigott cited a sixteenth-century law prohibiting the representation of biblical characters on stage (which had never been enforced very strictly) as his official reason for the prohibition, but in a private letter to Spenser Posonby, he admitted his disapproval of the play's offensive mixture of female sexuality and religious blasphemy.

It is a miracle of impudence; . . . [Salomé's] love turns to fury because John will not let her kiss him *in the mouth*—and in the last scene, where she brings in his head—if you please—on a "charger"—she *does* kiss his mouth, in a paroxysm of sexual despair. The piece is written in French—half Biblical, half pornographic—by Oscar Wilde himself. Imagine the average British public's reception of it. (Quoted in Stephens 112)

Pigott's criticism focuses on Wilde's finale, pathologized by the phrase "paroxysm of sexual despair" and cast as "pornographic," and affirms its an-

ticipated shock effect for “the average British public.” In its unsigned book review of the French edition, the *London Times* echoed the censor’s outrage, focusing on *Salomé’s* sexual perversity and blasphemy, its depiction of “situations the reverse of sacred” (February 23, 1893, 8). In interviews, Wilde acknowledged *Salomé’s* likely shock effect but presented it as further evidence of the play’s avant-garde qualities: different from the French, who loved his play, the barbaric English merely banned what they had not understood (*Oscar Wilde: Interviews and Recollections*, ed. Mikhail, 186–91). Wilde was then at the peak years of his career. A beloved *enfant terrible* of London society (satirized by Gilbert and Sullivan in *Patience* and in numerous *Punch* cartoons), he was a respected author. In 1890, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* had been published, and *Lady Windermere’s Fan* had opened to rave reviews. The censor’s decision came as a surprise not only to Wilde himself, who famously declared in interviews with English and French journalists (*Oscar Wilde: Interviews and Recollections*, ed. Mikhail, 188) that he would give up his citizenship and would become a citizen of France (leading to a famous *Punch* cartoon of Wilde as a French soldier carrying the *Salomé* script as his enlistment papers), but to most of the theatrical world as well. The unsympathetic *New York Times* reported on July 3, 1892, “All London is laughing at Oscar Wilde’s threat to become a Frenchman” (quoted in Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde* 373). Wilde never did leave England, however, and it is a cruel irony of fate that Wilde could have avoided his 1895 trials and imprisonment had he only done so.

Sarah Bernhardt never played *Salomé*, even though the financially desperate Wilde offered her the script from prison in 1895. “She wept (the right response) and then . . . —for whatever reason—she refused,” so the censor’s decision thus “marks . . . the collaboration that was never completed, the dream-team that never played, the supergroup that never appeared” (Stokes 150, 149). *Salomé* was finally published in two editions, French (1893, by Library de l’Art Indépendent, Paris) and English (1894, by the Bodley Head [i.e., John Lane and Elkin Mathews] of London) with Aubrey Beardsley’s famous illustrations, which Wilde disliked but tolerated, as Joan Navarre and others have shown. Although Lord Alfred Douglas’s name is given as the official translator for the 1894 book in the dedication (“To Lord Alfred Bruce Douglas the translator of my play”), we know that Wilde was so dissatisfied with Douglas’s translation that he revised and completed it himself. Hence the English text of *Salomé* is both Wilde’s own and, chronologically speaking, Wilde’s final version. For this reason, I have decided to quote from the English edition in *Salomé’s Modernity*, while consulting the French original where appropriate.

The play saw its world premiere in Paris on February 11, 1896, under the direction of avant-garde director Aurélien Lugné-Poë and featuring Lina Munte in the title role. Wilde was still in prison, and the legal status of *Salomé's* production rights was unresolved. Beset by “various backstage disasters” and masking the homoerotic relationship between the Page and Narraboth by assigning an actress to play the page (a decision that reportedly upset Wilde, who was otherwise very grateful to Lugné-Poë), the production nevertheless received warm reviews and continued the French esteem for Wilde (Tydeman and Price 25–31). In Germany, where Max Reinhardt had launched a splendid production that moved Strauss to compose his opera, Wilde's play was equally admired; shortly thereafter, *Salomé* also became popular in Russia, Japan, and China. In England, however, *Salomé* was only accessible via the book editions and private performances of the play, until the ban from the public stage was finally lifted in 1931. The first private performances in England—hence the British premiere of the play—were undertaken in 1905 by the New Stage Players at the Bijou Theatre and shortly thereafter by Charles Ricketts (who had consulted Wilde on stage design for a previous aborted French production, of which significant sketches by both Wilde and Ricketts survive) at King's Hall, Covent Garden (Tydeman and Price 40–57). Unfortunately, Wilde never saw the play performed during his lifetime.

Any Wilde scholar can attest that the most profound pleasures of working on Wilde—his antimimetic stance, his anticipation of much of contemporary critical and cultural theory, his personal and professional paradoxes, the impossibility of pinning him down completely, conclusively, forever—are also somewhat vexing reminders of the limitations of literary and cultural criticism. Despite more than a century's worth of inquiry, Oscar Wilde, as man and writer, remains “a chameleon, forever defying authentic, trans-historical definition, forever donning new masks, forever being reinvented” (Böker, Corballis, and Hibbard 9). As Peter Dickinson, tongue in cheek, puts Wilde's slipperiness,

The proliferation of Oscar's posthumous personae . . . continues unabated: Oscar the literary modernist, the sexual liberationist, the Irish nationalist, is joined by Oscar the anarchist, Oscar the socialist, Oscar the individualist, Oscar the feminist, Oscar the iconoclast, Oscar the pop star. The list expands exponentially until the frustrated scholar/reader wants to scream “Will the real Oscar Wilde please stand up?” To which the inevitable reply must necessarily be: “No, not that one, the other one.” (430–31)⁵

Yet Joseph Bristow writes in his introduction to the recent volume *Oscar Wilde and Modern Culture*, "At present, there seems to be no end in sight to Wilde's enduring attractiveness to our contemporary world" (xiii).

My object in *Salome's Modernity* is not to add another set of inalienable "truths" about Oscar Wilde or about *Salomé* to the critical canon. Rather, my project is more modest than that; it is oriented toward the performative mechanisms and functions of these two floating signifiers in twentieth- and twenty-first-century modernity and investigates the various ways in which *Salomé* and Wilde have become ideal placeholders for larger cultural and philosophical concerns of modernity. I agree with Dickinson that "one of the central contradictions about the process of 'interpreting Oscar' . . . is that it always reveals more about us readers than it does about him as a writer" (431). In *Salome's Modernity*, I wish to examine the specific reasons why and the ways in which *Salomé* and Wilde have come to acquire important meaning in our own modern culture and what that reveals about us as readers.

My own approach to Oscar Wilde, *Salomé*, and their cultural afterlives has been influenced by feminist and queer literary and cultural criticism, critical theory, and my Foucauldian understanding of transgression as an integral part of the very society and culture against which it is ostensibly trying to rebel. But while these theories function as lenses that direct and help sharpen my gaze at certain issues and phenomena, I do not feel beholden to any particular theoretical approach. By inquiring into the *Salome* theme across different periods, media, and genres and across the spectrum from high- to middle- to lowbrow culture and by keeping its theoretical commitments flexible, *Salome's Modernity* also affiliates itself with the new modernist studies that has forcefully arisen in the last decade or so. As Douglas Mao and Rebecca Walkowitz write in the introduction to *Bad Modernisms*, "the new modernist studies has moved toward a pluralism or a fusion of theoretical commitments, as well as a heightened attention to continuities and intersections across the boundaries of artistic media, to collaborations and influences across national and linguistic borders, and (especially) to the relationship between individual works of art and the larger cultures in which they emerged" (2). This comparative and flexible, yet always historically grounded, approach in *Salome's Modernity* is dictated by the nature of my project, which has followed *Salome* wherever she danced, making use of many original archival materials that required close attention to context and intertextual relations. More generally, though, I believe that the new modernist studies is uniquely suited to bringing to the

forefront those pervasive modernist ideas and concepts that are spread across many different areas of culture and that have influenced or continue to live on in Western culture even “after” literary and artistic modernism proper. Among these are the aesthetics of transgression and its continuation of modernist investments in the ecstatic, subversive, individual body that have made the Salome theme so popular in the twentieth century.

The two concepts that define my title and focus, modernity and transgression, are notoriously difficult to define, yet it is necessary to give at least working definitions at the outset. Some of the most useful general definitions of modernity—such as Theodor Adorno’s declaration (in *Minima Moralia*) that modernity is a qualitative, not a chronological, quality—are necessarily open and vague. Modernism, modernity’s literary-cultural twin, has proved impossible to pin down in terms of historical period and spatial reach (modernity and modernism are phenomena that have occurred and are occurring nonsimultaneously in different parts of the world, with critical favor or bias leaning toward the West and the North). I generally concur with Rita Felski’s views in *The Gender of Modernity* that what we define as modern is a heterogeneous phenomenon related, at least in the West, to Enlightenment discourses and is subject to historical interpretation and conflict: “modernity is not a homogeneous *Zeitgeist* which was born at a particular moment in history, but rather . . . it comprises a collection of interlocking institutional, cultural, and philosophical strands which emerge and develop at different times and which are often only defined as ‘modern’ retrospectively” (12, 15). Literary and artistic modernism can usefully be understood as “a set of responses to problems posed by the conditions of modernity” in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the case of the Salome theme, such problems include the crisis of faith, the aesthetics-ethics controversy, stereotypes of femininity, the fascination with sexual perversity, and the rise of modern individualism, to name just a few (Whitworth 3). “To be modern is to be part of a universe in which, as Marx said, ‘all that is solid melts into air’” (Berman 15), but it is also to be part of a universe in which forceful aesthetic responses to problems of modernity actively establish new forms of utopia and action. The modernist aesthetics of transgression we find in the Salome theme after Wilde, with its often scandalous secular and physical commitment to rebellious individualism, is one of those forms.

My understanding of *transgression* as a critical term derives from a Foucauldian understanding of transgression as interdependent and interacting with the very limits and boundaries it supposedly violates. One might say

that transgression is always a part of the system and power structures it is ostensibly directed against, a point Foucault himself made in "A Preface to Transgression" and one that has been picked up for feminist and queer studies of gender and sexuality by critics like Bidy Martin, Jana Sawicki, and Eve K. Sedgwick. According to this understanding, transgression is not a stepping outside of power or overthrowing it but, rather, the testing and engaging of moral, aesthetic, sexual, and other cultural discourses, paradoxically affirming while also clearly challenging and expanding them. Understood this way, the concept takes us back to its etymology (English *transgression* from Latin *transgredi*, "going over" or "stepping across"), which denotes a deliberate and intentional overstepping of an established boundary, norm, or habitual state; the transgressive act intentionally passes over and thus violates a prescribed limit.⁶ As Chris Jenks writes, transgression is "not merely the breaking of a code, a rebellion against normative social or cultural constraints; rather, it is the very pulse that constitutes our identities" (1); it is "the traversal of a boundary, and with that motion or passage, the deformation of the limits of form, identity or institution momentarily or provisionally" (10). In applying the concept to Wilde's *Salomé* and to Wilde himself in this book, I also borrow from Georges Bataille's interpretation of excess as a redefined physical (erotic and obscene) version of metaphysical ecstasy, a definition on which Foucault also builds (see chap. 1). I find Bataille's definition useful to describe the larger modernist, cultural-discursive movement toward sensation, transgressive eroticism, and physical ecstasy at work in Wilde's *Salomé* and some of its twentieth- and twenty-first-century heirs, which employed these as secular replacements for the religious sublime.

The modernist aesthetics of transgression has an interesting relationship with the humanist tradition, in that it disregards or negates the idea of individual transformation (*Bildung*) for the good of society yet paradoxically continues, through utopian artistic images of the triumphant transgressive body, the very idea of individual fulfillment and self-actualization. The post-Enlightenment investment in art as a moral and social agency of individual and social transformation was intrinsically intertwined with the history of humanism itself, associated, within the German tradition, with such figures as Goethe, Schiller, Lessing, and Schelling (and in the background of this tradition, Aristotle) and, in the English-speaking world, especially with the names of Matthew Arnold, John Ruskin, and Walter Pater, with the latter acting as a complex transitional figure. For the high humanist tradition presented by these writers, art was an effective tool of not only indi-

vidual but also, via the individual, often social, political, moral, and religious transformation, but it was not transgressive in the sense of an individual rebellion against those traditional authorities.

Interestingly, Wilde's *Salomé* dramatizes the *fantasy* of violent transgression more than it constitutes so much of a transgression itself, even though it was banned and, together with Strauss's opera, censored in many countries. However shocking they seemed to contemporaries, the play and, indirectly, the opera built on various elements of nineteenth-century tradition, taking these elements yet further and innovating their purpose, to be sure, but not really intending to insult and alienate their audiences. Rather, both Wilde and Strauss wanted their work to appeal to contemporaries and thereby to consolidate their own fame; as I argue in chapter 2, theirs was a popular avant-gardist intent, not an entirely subversive one. We must make a distinction, then, between the contents of the Wildean vision of *Salomé* as a transgressive individual and twentieth-century fantasies of Wilde, on the one hand, and the form and style of the play and the opera as historically situated texts that mixed innovative avant-garde elements with well-known, accepted, popular features and strategies, on the other. A similar relationship between avant-garde and popular aspects can be found in many of the twentieth- and twenty-first-century adaptations and transformations of *Salomé* as well, indicating and exemplifying again the entanglement and interdependency of discourses of transgression with their opposing, normative ideologemes and with material conditions.

In the images of *Salomé* and Wilde in Western culture, transgressions of the female body—both the straight one and, in the case of the two women discussed in chapters 3 and 4, the lesbian or bisexual one—intersect with those of the male homosexual body. *Salomé* and Oscar Wilde have been read with and through one another as icons of modernity for more than a century now, and there are reasons both for their longevity and fecundity as cultural images and for their special appeal, the utopian-dystopian signification of their transgressive bodies. In analyzing a variety of *Salomé* adaptations and related texts in literature, opera, dance, and film from the 1890s to the 1990s, I am interested in identifying and illuminating the central epistemological underpinnings and functions of these two images of *Salomé* and Wilde, which have told the cultural stories of individual erotic-aesthetic transgression and sensational excess differently at different times. In analyzing individual versions, I ask: What are the specific aesthetic figurations and mechanisms of the *Salomé* and Wilde figures in each version, and what functions and effects do they produce—both specific and general, within a comparative analysis that ranges from the 1850s to the present?

More generally, what can a cultural epistemology of the Salome theme tell us about the state of the modern cultural imagination itself, its continuing enlistment of aesthetic and sexual ideologemes as utopias of modern individualism, human agency, and freedom? How did Salomé and Wilde become “us” or “them”?

In paying attention to the separate circumstances as well as the intersections between these two differently gendered figures of transgression—female and male; straight, gender-ambiguous, and gay—my study continues and expands the critique of gendered notions of modernity begun by feminist modernist scholar Rita Felski. *Salome's Modernity* draws attention to the larger fields of discourse—literary, cultural, philosophical, political, social—that surrounded and suffused fantasies and fears of the transgressive erotic body and transgressive aesthetic agency that attached themselves to *both* of these two icons of modernity, Salomé and Wilde. As Felski writes, “many of the myths of modernity that pervade the last fin de siècle can be detected again in our own, suggesting that we may yet have to free ourselves from the seductive power of grand narratives” (10). Looking at the grand narrative of transgression surrounding Salomé and Wilde in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries suggests that Felski was right.

Chapter 1 provides the textual and historical grounding for *Salome's Modernity* by offering an innovative reading of Oscar Wilde's *Salomé* as a modernist text that built on thematic elements in nineteenth-century predecessor texts while promoting a genuinely modernist aesthetics of transgressive erotic and aesthetic agency. My purpose in revisiting texts like Mallarmé's “Hérodiade,” Flaubert's “Hérodias” and *Salammbô*, and Huysmans's ekphrastic Moreau passages in *À rebours* is not to repeat previous scholarship on their relationship to Wilde but to read these texts together with and through *Salomé* in such a way that each text's specific importance to Wilde's modernist refashioning of certain themes and styles comes into sharp focus. Chapter 2 then offers a reinterpretation of *Salomé's* first and most famous adaptation, Richard Strauss's opera *Salome* (1905), the first modernist music drama. Contrary to most scholars, I argue that Strauss's revolutionary score presents an aesthetically attuned, creative programmatic development of Wilde's play rather than an idiosyncratic overhaul of its libretto source. It emphasized, rather than obscured, the ecstatic, sensationalist, and transgressive elements of Wilde's *Salomé* and shared with it the stylistic goal to manufacture overwhelming sensation and secular sublimity by aesthetic means.

The next two chapters are dedicated to two modernist female artists, the Canadian American dancer Maud Allan and the Russian American actress

and producer Alla Nazimova, who found in Wilde's play a fertile ground for their feminist creativity as pioneers of modern dance and modernist art cinema, respectively. Chapter 3 introduces Maud Allan's famous and popular dance piece *The Vision of Salomé* (1908) and goes on to analyze Allan's painful involvement in the so-called Pemberton-Billing Trial in England (1918), which illustrates a problematic cultural conflation in late Victorian and Edwardian culture between female aesthetic and erotic independence, homosexuality, feminism, and aesthetic transgression. In chapter 4, my reading of Alla Nazimova's *Salomé: An Historical Phantasy by Oscar Wilde* (1922), the first surviving feature film adaptation of Wilde's play, connects Nazimova's previous Broadway stage career—particularly her rise to fame with Henrik Ibsen's complex New Woman characters—with her work as an independent Hollywood producer. Nazimova put forward a daring gay-affirmative and avant-garde interpretation of Wilde's play that must be understood not only in the context of the film's queer aesthetic and its homage to Oscar Wilde, Nazimova's own bisexuality, and her creative popular avant-gardism but also in the context of her previous theater career and her interest in feminist themes: a direct line leads from Nazimova's interest in promoting modern drama and its complex female heroines to her take on Wilde's *Salomé*.

Finally, chapter 5 turns to recent adaptations of Wilde's Salome figure in film and popular literature and culture since the 1980s and shows how the modernist aesthetics of transgression lives on as a powerful myth in post-modern Western culture. In recent decades, Wilde and *Salomé* have been claimed for our own times and contexts as predecessors of a supposedly more enlightened era of sexual and artistic freedom: artists and audiences alike have interpreted Wilde's *Salomé* as a flagship text of coded gay desire and have seen *Salomé* either as Wilde's transgendered alter ego or as an aggressively sexual New Woman, reflecting a changed cultural climate comparatively more accepting of male homosexuality and feminist rebellion, but also problematically reducing *Salomé's* original transgressive impact.

Salome's Modernity can neither hope to give a comprehensive survey of almost one hundred years of Wildean *Salomé* adaptations, transformations, and theatrical productions nor do justice to all the different contexts in which they so richly appear. Hence I have focused on a few selected renditions judged best to show the broad spectrum opened by any inquiry into Wilde's take on the Salome figure in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, leaving out others whose connections to Wilde's *Salomé* are looser or less pronounced than those that feature prominently. Among the earlier

nineteenth-century versions, I concentrate on those that had a direct bearing on the modernist, transgressive elements in Wilde's play and only mention in passing Heinrich Heine's ironic Herodias episode in "Atta Troll" and Jules Laforgue's masterful spoof of Mallarmé's and Flaubert's fin de siècle Salomé obsession in *Moralités Légendaires*. I also set aside Arthur Symons's transformation of the Irish Sidhe myth in "The Daughters of Herodias" (along with Yeats's corresponding poem "The Hosting of the Sidhe") and other dance poems, which I have dealt with elsewhere in relation to Mallarmé's dancer trope and symbolist theory (Dierkes-Thrun, "Symons' Decadent Aesthetics") and to which Wilde's play is not directly relevant. For the same reason, I decided not to discuss Michael Field's Salome-themed poem "A Dance of Death" from *Poems of Adoration* (1912) and scattered references to Salome in their later work (*Queen Mariamne* [1908], *The Accuser* [1911]). Yeats's play *A Full Moon in March* (1935) and the symbolic role the Salome figure plays in his climactic fifteenth phase of *A Vision* would have been a better candidate for inclusion in *Salome's Modernity*, but again these materials bear little direct relation on Wilde's *Salomé* and have already been treated by Frank Kermode (*Romantic Image*; "Poet and Dancer Before Diaghilev"), Sylvia Ellis, Amy Koritz ("Women Dancing"), and others.

Among the better-known twentieth-century Salome versions I decided not to discuss in detail are Rita Hayworth's biblical-orientalist Technicolor spectacle *Salome* and Billy Wilder's wonderful film *Sunset Boulevard* (with Andrew Lloyd Webber's corresponding musical), which either are not based on Wilde's *Salomé* at all or incorporate it only as a minor, if integral and crucial, element of a different plot. The twentieth-century versions of the Wildean *Salomé* in popular culture are endless, and some are rather obscure, so that I had to make choices here as well. Among the versions I looked at but ultimately did not pick up for *Salome's Modernity* are Viereck and Eldridge's pulp fiction novel *Salome: The Wandering Jewess* (1930) and the 1986 Canadian graphic novel *Salome* by P. Craig Russell.

I also decided to leave out the reception of Wilde's *Salomé* in China and Japan (dealt with by Xiaoyi Zhou, Linda Pui-ling Wong, and Ayako Kano), which exceeds my current focus on Wilde's and *Salomé's* interpretation in Europe and North America. I left out as well the actual stage production and performance history of Wilde's play and Strauss's opera, except where it is directly relevant to my argument. William Tydeman and Steven Price already provide an invaluable survey of this stage history of *Salomé* in *Wilde—Salome* (1996). One theoretical question that could not be fully addressed in this book is *Salomé's* possible relationship to Wilde's reception of Hegel's idealism and Kant's theories of the beautiful and the sublime. As

Philip E. Smith and Michael S. Helfand have shown in their introduction to Wilde's *Oxford Notebooks*, Wilde was deeply immersed in the intellectual debates of his time, especially in Hegelian idealism. Hegel's and Kant's earlier influences on Wilde's aesthetics of transgression and modern individualism in *Salomé* and across other works would need further study than this volume can hope to provide.⁷

Finally, in my use of the French, English, or German spellings *Salomé*/*Salome* in this book, I follow the original spelling in the specific text I am discussing. I use *Salomé* for Wilde's French play and character, as well as for renditions by Flaubert, Huysmans, Allan, and Nazimova that originally use the accented spelling. For German and English usage (e.g., Strauss's, Russell's, or Krishnamma's versions), I use *Salome*. In passages that address the Salome figure in a more general semiotic, rhetorical, or historical sense tied to more than one text, I also use the regular English spelling.