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**Morality and Libertinism**  
**in Sade's *Justine* and Wilde's *Salome***  
**and the Representation of Dionysus, Aphrodite and Apollo**

Danae Nikolopoulou: 219032

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Signature

**Assessment Committee:**

- Efterpi Mitsi  
Professor, Department of English Language and Literature  
School of Philosophy  
National Kapodistrian University of Athens
- Anna Despotopoulou  
Professor, Director of the MA in “English Studies: Literature and Culture”  
Department of English Language and Literature  
School of Philosophy  
National Kapodistrian University of Athens
- Vassiliki Markidou  
Professor, Department of English Language and Literature  
School of Philosophy  
National Kapodistrian University of Athens

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### **Abstract**

The paradox regarding writers such as Marquis de Sade and Oscar Wilde is that, however frowned upon in their own time, they have received a lot of attention from the scholars. This is to be attributed to the multi-faceted nature of their works, which touches upon controversial issues: morality and libertinism are the two polar opposites which constitute a major theme of works such as *Justine* and *Salome*, albeit from different eras. The corruption and scandalous nature they were both accused of, though, by their contemporaries could be a manifestation of the Greek element, as well as an attempt to return to the Ancient Greek way of living. In other words, what Sade and Wilde captivated in their works is the human condition trapped in contemporary social conventions, and an attempt to break free from these shackles. The works in question are analysed from the perspective of “Dionysus, Aphrodite and Apollo”: a parallel Aleister Crowley drew between the Greek Olympian Gods and the hendriatis of Wine, Women and Song.

## Introduction

A parallel between Marquis de Sade and Oscar Wilde was drawn about a century ago by no other but Wilde himself. In *De Profundis* (1962), the long and bitter letter Wilde wrote to his lover Lord Alfred Douglas during his imprisonment in Reading Gaol, he relates the tortures the trial and the subsequent defamation inflicted on him, comparing himself to the notorious author of *Justine*, Marquis de Sade: “in the lowest mire of Malebolge, I sit between Gilles de Retz and the Marquis de Sade” (*De Profundis* 12). Even though Wilde remarked upon the connection with regards to their lifestyle and reputation, the two writers, albeit belonging to different countries, eras and literary movements, have a lot in common with regards to their works, as well. In particular, both Sade and Wilde have expressed certain views in their works concerning morality and libertinism. The purpose of this dissertation is to analyse the views around these two topics by delving into a close reading of *Justine* by Sade and *Salome* by Wilde, and carry out a further analysis of morality and libertinism in the context of the Greek element of *Justine* and *Salome*.

The first chapter delineates certain similarities not only between the two writers, but the two works, as well, in an attempt to demonstrate the common ground they share with regards to the topics of morality and libertinism. It will also delve into the Greek element of Dionysus, Aphrodite and Apollo, and how they, along with the symbols they stand for, are interpreted by writers such as Walter Pater and Friedrich Nietzsche.

The second chapter outlines certain details regarding Sade’s life and education. It also examines the various disciplines from which *Justine* has been studied, as well as literary movements that assist in its interpretation. Finally, this chapter demonstrates the basic themes Sade touches on in *Justine*—namely women, society, morality and libertinism—and draws the parallels between them and the Greek symbolisms of Aphrodite and Dionysus.

The third chapter presents the Victorian background in which Oscar Wilde thrived and fell from grace, and the way the morality of his era clashed with libertinism. Furthermore, the production details of *Salome* are presented, as well as an analysis of the play itself. Last but not least, this chapter juxtaposes *Salome* and the symbolisms of Aphrodite, Dionysus and Apollo.

The fourth and the final chapter of this dissertation constitutes the conclusion, relating the contribution of these two writers in canon, as well as the echo of the Greek element in the modern culture.

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## 1. From the Siècle de Lumières to the Fin de Siècle

Works aside, many similarities are to be found between the lives of Sade and Wilde. Both figures were well-educated writers who, however, fell from grace and lost their fortune, social status and contemporaries' favour on the grounds of their lifestyles. In particular, the two writers even suffered humiliation and imprisonment due to their sexual preferences, which were condemned as highly extreme and inappropriate by their peers and punishable by their respective societies. Sade was accused of abuse and molestation by various prostitutes he had liaised with, and was even tried and sentenced to death in absentia (Coward). Even if he had not involved himself in violent, capricious and profane encounters with prostitutes, he would have been found guilty of sodomy, as he did live in an era when such acts were punished by death (Philips xi). Similarly, in Victorian England, homosexuality constituted a crime from 1885 to 1967 and it was penalised with two years of imprisonment. Wilde got convicted in 1895 after having lost a libel case against the Marquess of Queensbury, Lord Douglas' father.

In spite of the hardships and setbacks they faced in prison, both writers remained faithful to writing, even in the most adverse circumstances. Not only did Sade go on writing in the Bastilles (Wainhouse vii), but he was also quite prolific:

[H]is literary output was so great that in 1788 he was able to compose a comprehensive catalogue of his works, listing no fewer than eight novels and volumes of short stories, sixteen historical novellas, two volumes of essays, an edition of diary notes, and some twenty plays. (Philips xiii)

On a similar note, Wilde, also composed *De Profundis* in Reading Gaol in the period of two months, between January and March 1897: “the letter was written on regulation blue prison paper, administered to Wilde one page at a time” (Varty ix). Wilde may have been allowed to write it for “medicinal purposes,” but he was not allowed to review his letter until it was returned to him upon his release on 18 May 1897; until then, each page was taken away from him upon completion (Belford 251). Other than *De Profundis*, which was written during Wilde's imprisonment, there is also *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, which he wrote shortly after he was released, inspired by his experience in prison.

The considerable amount of time both writers spent in prison also seemed to have had a severe impact on them. Arguably, Sade was greatly traumatised by his time in captivity and his confrontation with decapitation and death: “the sight of the guillotine did him ‘a hundred times more harm’ than his imprisonment in the Bastille ever did” (Philips xv). Additionally, imprisonment did take a toll on his work, since, upon the mob's invasion in the Bastille in 1789, various manuscripts were lost and destroyed. Sade even lost the unfinished manuscript of *120*

*Days of Sodom*, which devastated him (Schaeffer 411). In a similar manner, the living conditions of the Reading Gaol severely impacted Wilde's health, and he passed away three years after his release.

While their respective societies largely disapproved of the two writers on the grounds of their lifestyle and sexual preferences going against the law and therefore regarded as unethical, both Sade and Wilde had exhibited kindness to their contemporaries, even if such decisions turned out to be to their detriment. In Sade's defence, George Bataille (1897–1962) claims that "Sade did not possess this unlimited cruelty. He frequently had trouble with the police, who viewed him with suspicion but could not charge him with any real crime" (Bataille 52) referring to his charges mainly with atheism and the incidents of cruelty he exhibited during his encounters with prostitutes. A case in point would be that Sade may have been prosecuted by his in-laws and imprisoned after their moves, however, he did not act upon a vengeful spirit:

[Sade] was eventually appointed one of the section's twenty judges, positions which he could easily have exploited to avenge himself on the Montreuil, whose death-warrant fate placed before him. A lifelong opponent of the death-penalty, however, Sade saved his in-laws and many others from the guillotine, a decision that eventually led to his arrest on 8 December 1793 (Philips xv).

Instead of avenging himself and treating his in-laws in the same way he had been treated, Sade released them; even if it did not turn out to be much to his avail.

Similarly, the reason why Wilde prosecuted Lord Douglas' father, the Marquess of Queensbury, for criminal libel was to save his lover from his father's violent and aggressive temperament, as it is hinted in *De Profundis* (24–30). Even after his imprisonment and subsequent abandonment by Lord Douglas, Wilde still struggled to abstain from hatred and treat him with love in *De Profundis*: "At all costs I must keep Love in my heart. If I go into prison without Love what will become of my soul?" (*De Profundis* 37). He always maintained a didactic tone in hope to teach him what love is: "Are you beginning to understand a little? ... You already know what Hate is. Is it beginning to dawn on you what Love is, and what is the nature of Love?" (*De Profundis* 38). Wilde and Douglas also got back together after the former got out of prison, albeit for four months only. However, it becomes obvious that not only did Wilde try to protect Douglas, but he also held no grudges for his behaviour. Therefore, in both cases the two writers' deviant sexuality, insubordination to the rules of their time and age and the overall libertinism they were accused of does not imply an overall detachment from morality; if anything, they seemed to have added a new layer to it.

### 1.1 Similarities between *Justine* and *Salome*

Both *Justine* and *Salome* evoked strong reactions among their writers' contemporaries. To sidestep the scandal and ensuing imprisonment a work like *Justine* would bring about, Sade published it anonymously in 1791. Even though it was tacitly embraced by the French readership, Napoleon Bonaparte issued an order to have the anonymous author of *Justine* arrested in 1801. When the entirety of this work was attributed to Sade, he was arrested without even a trial, so as to avoid the scandal (Coward vii). With regards to *Salome*, Lord Chamberlain prohibited it from being performed in England even after the rehearsals had already started, ostensibly on the grounds of "an old law forbidding the stage interpretations of biblical figures" (Primorac). It was, however, highly likely that the actual reason behind this prohibition was not the featuring of the biblical figures itself, but their highly sensual and overtly sexual portrayal (Primorac).

The similarities of the two works are not only to be traced on the way they stirred the audience, but their strong associations to actresses, as well. The introduction of *Justine* is a letter penned by Sade himself, addressed to the actress Marie Constance Quesnet, Sade's companion until his death (1). Sade expresses his utmost concern to enlighten Quesnet with regards to the triumph of virtue over vice, "good rewarded and evil punished, such is the general trend of works of this nature" (*Justine* 3). In fact, he appears to care little about the inaccurate opinions or the exaggerated reactions of his contemporaries, and is only anxious about Quesnet's reaction to his work and views: "my success depends on your opinion alone" (*Justine* 3).

As to *Salome*, Wilde was adamant on the assignment of *Salome* to the French actress Sarah Bernhardt (1844–1923); to such an extent that, after the play's ban on the English stage in 1892, there was a misunderstanding on behalf of an English reviewer of *The Times* who mistakenly wrote that the play had been created specifically for the French actress (Wilde qtd in Ross viii). Wilde seemed delighted with Bernhardt's indispensable contribution to his play: "this was naturally, and always will be, a source of pride and pleasure to me" (Wilde qtd in Ross viii). Even so, Wilde could not abide with the idea that the general public had been misinformed about Bernhardt having inspired the play, and went as far as to send a letter to *The Times* to dispel any confusion with regards to that.

What is more, another similarity to be traced between the two works is that both *Justine* and *Salome* were written in the French language. And while French was Sade's native language, this was not the case with Wilde. However, there was a special reason why Wilde opted to

write *Salome* in French, which will be discussed in chapter 3.6 “Dionysus, Aphrodite and Apollo in *Salome*” in further detail.

While *Justine* also features instances of captivity, possibly inspired by Sade’s own days of imprisonment, as some critics have argued, the theme of captivity that similarly comes up in *Salome* with the restriction of Iokanaan did not reflect Wilde’s life during the publication of the play; it rather seemed to foretell the destiny of imprisonment that would ensue three years later, with Wilde’s two-year sentence.

The main aspects of similarity which will be the focus of this dissertation, however, is the way both *Justine* and *Salome* hint at the concepts of morality and libertinism. The term morality is associated with ethics and the choices one makes between right and wrong, as opposed to how morality is generally perceived in each writer’s respective era. As to the term of libertinism, it will be discussed as found in Aystryn Wainhouse’s introduction to *120 Days of Sodom*: “libertine practices or habits of life; disregard of convention or authority in social, moral, sexual or religious matters; extreme promiscuity ; the absolute assertion of the will, regardless of the consequence, even to murder” (10). While libertinism and morality are supposed to divert, as one is expected to contradict the other, this does not always seem to be the case in the two following works.

## 1.2 Dionysus, Aphrodite and Apollo

Among the many similarities the two writers, as well as *Justine* and *Salome* share, special attention should be drawn on the aspect of the Greek element that features, as well, in the form of the triptych ‘Wine, Women and Song.’ The hendiatis derives from the anonymous translation of German lyrics which have been attributed to Martin Luther (1483–1546). Before the appearance of these lyrics in *Musical World* (1837), Fred R. Shapiro mentions that, according to Wolfgang Mieder, they first appeared in print in a German folk song in 1602 (477–478):

Who loves not woman, wine, and song  
Remains a fool his whole life long (Anonymous 65).

The triptych in question appears in various countries and cultures, and while the translation slightly, or considerably, varies from one to the other, the essence remains more or less the same: pleasure derives from intoxication, sexual intercourse and music.

And yet, the association of the Greek element to the Wine, Women and Song as it appears in *Justine* and *Salome* is not to be made with the Greek version of the hendiatis—‘Πῦρ, Γυνή και Θάλαττα’, which translates into ‘Fire, Woman and Sea’ and, unlike the original

triptych, bears negative connotations—but with the way Aleister Crowley, a British writer and occultist, interpreted it in *Energised Enthusiasm* (1913):

The Greeks say that there are three methods of discharging the Lyden Jar of Genius. These three methods they assign to three Gods. These three Gods are Dionysus, Apollo, Aphrodite. In English: wine, woman and song (Crowley IV).

Heavily preoccupied with intellect and spirituality, in the work in question, Crowley expresses concern as to whether it is self-imposed celibacy or meaningful sexual intercourse that helps one approach genius and intellect (Crowley II). The writer here associates each one of the three aspects required to that end to the three Greek gods: Dionysus, Aphrodite and Apollo to Wine, Women and Song respectively.

Aphrodite, the Olympian goddess traditionally associated with love and beauty, in this case would correspond with Women: passion, and gratification of sexual desire. These concepts have dominated humanity's interest and explored repeatedly throughout the centuries. For example, Aphrodite features in Plato's *Symposium*, where Pausanias mentions two distinctly different Aphrodites: Aphrodite Urania and Aphrodite Pandemos (Plato 180d), alluding to the two types of love represented by either. Aphrodite Urania refers to a pure love, which, however, can only be felt by males in *Symposium*, while Aphrodite Pandemos alludes to urges and basest instincts demanding to be fulfilled, applying both to men and women alike. Apart from the connotation with the sexual pleasures, Aphrodite Pandemos is further associated to bringing the citizens together into one political body (Plato 181a–e). What can be inferred from the connotations between Aphrodite Pandemos and the unity of the citizens is that love is an emotion that, in its basest form, can be felt by everyone, and as a result, it brings people together by reminding them of their common ground. Everyone, men and women alike, are born with urges that need to be satisfied; provided that people are born this way, this should not be a reason to be judged or even prosecuted.

Dionysus, the Olympian god of wine, held a special spot in the Victorian era in the spirit of Victorian Hellenism, possibly due to his connotations with Nature and the way urban life suppressed it—both on a metaphorical and on a literal level. To Walter Pater (1839–1894), who had extensively studied Dionysus, the Greek god was “the dispenser of the earth's hidden wealth, giver of riches through the vine” (*The Study of Dionysus* 14), and constituted a religion in himself that promises “return to the basic gratifications of a Physical universe” (Frazier 283)—as Denys offered to Auxerre in *Denys l' Auxerrois* (1900)—by connecting humans with their nature:

So they passed on to think of Dionysus (naming him at last from the brightness of the sky and the moisture of the earth) not merely as the soul of the vine, but of all that life in flowing things of which the vine is the symbol, because its [sic] most emphatic example. (*The Study of Dionysus* 13)

According to Pater, the body and the senses unlock more spiritual planes in turn: “a whole world of thoughts, surmises, greater and less experiences” (*The Study of Dionysus* 10). It is the base step a man must take to access the refined, the intelligence and the soul (*The Study of Dionysus* 9–14). Such theories, of course, would go against the restrained Victorian society and the mortification of the flesh they embraced, as, Pater warns, should one not indulge in the raw energy Dionysus is associated with, ecstasy will not be possible.

Pater goes on to elaborate on how Dionysus, capable of granting life, was also associated to death and resurrection:

In Athens he was also the god of the theatre, and tragedies were performed in his honour. ... If Dionysus enters a human being, he or she becomes imbued with godlike qualities and will develop unprecedented talents. Dionysus, the hunter and the hunted, is a god of duality, as he brings life and death, pain and pleasure, ecstasy and grief, a god who dies and then returns renewed – an aspect of the myth Pater concentrated on. (Rippl 349)

Similarly to the aforementioned theory of Aphrodite Pandemos, which appeals to the passions of men and women alike and brings the citizens together, the element of resurrection and the duality of Dionysus’ nature can also be associated with the unconscious of a society on a collective level. By the constant reminder of death around the corner, one is reminded to celebrate life; hence the instincts Dionysus is traditionally associated with that lure in man and burst out with wine and the state of ecstasy that follows:

“Is Pater only being true to the legend of Dionysus Zagreus which sees the god as undergoing a necessary eclipse in winter only to come alive in the first days of spring? Or is he working from the psychological reality which makes the sorrow attendant upon the wholehearted and exclusive satisfaction of the senses, a pre-figurement to a necessary sadness of the flesh?” (Frazier 282).

Disorder and anarchy are celebrated briefly before the intoxication fades and man conforms with society and law as earlier. However, it is during these brief moments of ecstasy that man tosses any shackles stipulating how they should behave, and act upon their own wishes and desires. In *Denys l’Auxerrois*, Dionysus needed to be dismembered in an outburst of violence for society to experience catharsis and go back to normal (*Denys l’Auxerrois* 76), and perhaps

this is why his nature is this very duality; for the instincts to bubble to the surface, be appeased and then retire until the next time one needs an outburst. Dionysus' duality of life and death is vital to keeping society in order.

In *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), Nietzsche (1844–1900) goes beyond the nature of Dionysus and elaborates on another aspect that could act as a foil to the primitiveness he brings forth and even tame it: Apollo. For Nietzsche, Dionysus stands for the primitive man and initiates a mystical collective ecstasy, tapping on everyone's innermost desire to return to the womb and escape the prison of themselves:

Either through the influence of narcotic drink, of which all primitive men and peoples speak, or through the powerful coming on of spring, which drives joyfully through all of nature, that Dionysian excitement arises. As its power increases, the subjective fades into complete forgetfulness of self" (Nietzsche 9).

In other words, Dionysus and the ecstasy associated with him constitute a protection against entrapment, as well as the evanescence of human life (Nietzsche 13). On the other hand, Apollo is the civilised man, and rather than the feeling of entrapment Dionysus tries to escape, Apollo is linked to optimism, beauty, reason and understanding (Nietzsche 15). The god of music helps the man combat against the Dionysian terror and its mania.

The associations to Apollo could, indeed, start with music, but go beyond music and include the arts all together offering a channel and an outlet of emotions to the man suppressed by society to suppress their innermost desires, or maddened by the instincts of a youth that is soon to perish either to social conventions such as marriage, or old age. However, it is also highly likely that, without the contribution of the other two gods—Dionysus and Aphrodite—and all they stand for, there would be no inspiration for art or whatsoever.

All three aspects, therefore, illustrate the human nature, and this is exactly why they all go hand-in-hand. Crowley himself acknowledges an undeniable connection between the three:

Music has two parts; tone or pitch, and rhythm. The latter quality associates it with the dance, and that part of dancing which is not rhythm is sex. Now that part of sex which is not a form of the dance, animal movement, is intoxication of the soul, which connects it with wine... By the use of the three methods in one, the whole being of man may thus be stimulated (VII).

The connotations should be more or less obvious: ecstasy, love and music shall initiate the pursuit and result in the conquest of the intellect that Crowley deemed of importance not only to be a prolific writer, but also to enrich the quality of the writings.

Taking the aforementioned into consideration, one cannot help but wonder to what extent all three of these aspects can be unleashed without society being deeply unsettled. Does the manifestation of these three—Dionysus, Aphrodite and Apollo; Wine, Women and Song—count as libertinism? If so, does it, indeed, go against morality? To what extent can these three principles be encountered in Sade’s *Justine* and Wilde’s *Salome*, and where is the line to be drawn between morality and libertinism?

## 2. *Justine* by Marquis de Sade

### 2.1 Marquis de Sade

“Sade considered himself man of letters,” Wainhouse notes; (vii) and this was the case, indeed. Sade was an external student of Louis-le-Grand Jesuit school (Schaeffer 20). His father could not afford the entirety of the tuition fees, therefore, Sade was treated almost as an outcast, as all the *externes* who could not fully pay the tuition fees were. Neil Schaeffer assumes that Sade in all probability underperformed there, as in the four years of his education, his name does not appear on the annual list of prize-winners, which Schaeffer finds an oddity for Sade, considering his “analytic and argumentative skills” (21). According to John Philips, Sade’s intellectual predispositions have been cultivated accordingly by the Jesuits there, as due to them, Sade later on developed a “rigorous intellectual inquiry, the debating skills of classical rhetoric, and above all, a lifelong passion for the theatre” (viii). Apart from his own education, though, Sade also happened to originate from an educated background:

Sade’s father was a close friend of Voltaire and himself wrote verses, while Donatien’s uncle in particular had a fine and extensive library which, alongside the classic authors, included all the major works of contemporary Enlightenment philosophy as well as a fair sample of erotic writings. (Philips viii)

Sade also remained an avid reader during his life, even in his captivity. Not only did Sade thoroughly study the classical authors, but he also made sure to keep abreast of the works of his contemporaries, as it becomes evident in the philosophical influences of *Justine*:

To fill the long days and evenings [of his captivity in Bastille, Sade] read voraciously, gradually amassing a varied and extensive library which included the classics he had read as a child (for example, Homer, Virgil, Montaigne, La Fontaine, Boccaccio), works of Enlightenment philosophy by Buffon, La Mettrie, d’Holbach, Diderot, Rousseau, and Voltaire, and of course drama and

fiction, by Beaumarchais, Marivaux, Voltaire, Defoe, Rousseau, Shakespeare, and many others (Philips xiii).

As it can be expected from such a highly educated person, therefore, *Justine* is not the work of pornography it has—more often than not—been mistaken for. *Justine*, along with the majority of Sade's works, express the writer's concerns regarding virtue and vice, as well as to what extent the two can be associated with libertinism.

As Maria Vara notes, there are three versions of *Justine*. The first one, published in 1787 was called *Les Infortunes de la Vertu*. The second one—the one that will be discussed in this dissertation is *Justine ou Les Malheurs de la Vertu* and came out in 1791, and it was followed by *La Nouvelle Justine ou Les Malheurs de la Vertu*, which was published in 1797 (103). All three versions narrate the misfortunes of Justine, a girl who finds herself in the streets as soon as her father goes bankrupt, and is consistently abused with no mercy by countless villains throughout the book, who engage her in discourses concerning virtue and vice. Justine exhibits the same tenacity to defend her beliefs without fail from cover to cover, even in spite of her ruthless sexual and psychological abuse.

## 2.2 *Justine*

“Not only his work but his thinking remains impenetrable,” Maurice Blanchot notes about Sade (39). “[H]e reasons with impeccable clarity and not with inconsiderable logic ... He expounds and affirms and offers proof; he comes back to the same problem a hundred times over ... he studies it from every angle, he considers every possible objection and answers them all, then manages to come up with some further objections and replies to them, as well” (Blanchot 39). The paradox here, of course, is that even though this is the case, indeed, Sade's works still constitute a matter of debate among the critics, as they cannot agree either on the angle from which they should be studied, or on their writer's intentions. Even if, as Vara points out, Sade and his works have attracted the attention of “[s]cholars from diverse disciplines” (101), all contributing to the ongoing debate of what his works expressed, as Bataille supports, “[f]rom whichever angle we approach him, he eludes us” (48).

The works of the French philosopher have elicited numerous reactions from critics throughout the centuries, with some rejecting his works as pornographic, and his views as extravagant, or extremely radical. However, even the critics who embrace his views, conduct research and write essays on him are seemingly divided not only as to how the content of Sade's works is to be interpreted, but on the approaches in which it is to be examined, as well (gothic, feminism, existential, nihilistic, etc.) As a result, even after prolific criticism from various

viewpoints and perspectives, his works remain a mystery to the modern reader due to the radical, and yet highly contradictory views he maintains (Roche 1), as well as to what extent he actually stands behind the totality of his positions: “[H]is intellectual legacy has hardly been resolved” (Allison, Roberts and Weiss qtd in Vara 101).

Sade’s works have been considered to belong to his contemporary Gothic genre due to the strong element of terror. While *Justine*, indeed, exhibits typical features of gothic literature—“excessive claustrophobia” (Vara 107), “underground passages and cemeteries” (Hall 248), “dark, enclosed spaces, a maiden fleeing her predators” (Vara 104)—it is possible that Sade only uses them to set the tone and create the right atmosphere for his novel; elements which would all the more contribute to Justine’s fear and anguish. Even so, *Justine* lacks the strong supernatural element that would make it purely Gothic. Hall argues, though, that Sade “saw clearly the limitations and dilemma of the Gothic novel, noting that a work employing the devices of the apparently supernatural and temporarily fearful either had to explain these away, or had to admit the presence of the paranormal and thus end any chance of *vraisemblance*” (Hall 246). In other words, given the heavily philosophical context of *Justine*, as well as Sade’s other works, his focus on the novel was far from building suspense by the insinuation of supernatural beings; “It is not the unreal that perturbs Sade’s heroines but the real. The potential in nature and human nature to cause virtue to suffer is far more important than any notion of mystery or suspense” (Hall 246). The real world and its vice constitute much more of a threat against girls with the moral values of *Justine* than any fictional creation. “The reader may think that he or she is safe in the real world away from fictional horrors ... [but] Sade shows how close those fictional horrors come to reality” (Hall 246–248). While other novelists attribute it to the “lasting power of the imagination” (Hall 248), Sade makes it very clear it is all about the way of the world.

With regards to the genre of Gothic in its entirety, Sade held Ann Radcliffe with respect (Coward), and yet, he found Lewis’s *The Monk* to be “superior in all respects to the strange flights of Mrs. Radcliffe’s brilliant imagination” (Sade qtd in Vara 105). The element of terror is omnipresent in Sade, but works in a completely different way. *Justine* does not come up against the supernatural, or some creation of ‘phantasmagoria’; she deals with the deepest, basest instincts of a human mind, and every confrontation is more horrifying than the last one. And yet, she is not tied to her principles of virtue and morality due to fear, but because she is afraid of the nasty consequences of immorality on her and her fellow-human beings. When terror and fear should make her waver, they instead strengthen her faith and accentuate her martyrdom and her heroic nature.

While verisimilitude is, indeed, put to the test at parts of the book—especially with regards to Justine’s gullibility to engage herself in new troubles—and it is highly likely that Sade himself did not always strive to maintain it from cover to cover (Didier 441), it still constitutes an indispensable part of the novel. Sade begins his introductory letter to Quesnet as: “[t]his fiction ... is not as fictional as some might think” (*Justine* 3). What is very clearly stated, from the very opening lines of *Justine*, is the fact that the incidents narrated might as well have been real.

In tandem with the trends of his time and the Enlightenment movement, Sade aligned himself with some of its most basic principles, which include moving away from the myth (Horkheimer and Adorno 4–34) and getting closer to Reason and Knowledge. At the same time, Sade seemed to be one step ahead of his contemporaries by writing a novel which, in numerous aspects, paves the way for the movement of Naturalism.

According to Martin Schütze, Naturalism “conceived man as a necessary product of purely material forces, denying to him the possibility of free will, of choice in his actions, rejecting his moral responsibility, and therefore the possibility of guilt” (Schütze 426). A human’s actions were not determined by some tragic flaw, but by the impact of society on them. The characters were to be studied on par with the “totality of the social forces which help determine the personality of the individual members of society” (Schütze 426). In other words, the human being and their actions was strictly a matter of the pressure they became subjected to by society and the environment, and, as a result, their character was shaped accordingly: “the social environment, and its effects are represented not in their relation to the individual as such, but in their relation to him as a member of society” (Schütze 429). In order to accurately portray the impact of society on the human, a very faithful representation of said society is required in fiction. This is why, as Schütze highlights:

“Zola, in his "Essays on Naturalism," demands a faithful copy of life, manners, and characteristic speech, insisting on a greater stage realism, on the use of dialect when characteristic, and denying to the writer the privilege of rejecting things ugly, even offensive, provided they are required by the situation” (Schütze 434).

Naturalism, as Schütze points out, re-establishes the Aristotlean theory of the tragic idea, and consequently, redefines the notion of catharsis:

“From the time of Aristotle until the rise of the naturalistic drama the theory of the tragic guilt has been accepted as a matter beyond doubt. The dominant, chiefly Lessing's, interpretation of Aristotle's view is that the hero must commit some fault, some violation of an ethical law, for which he suffers the penalty in the catastrophe. The spectator, conscious of his own similarity to the tragic figure and convinced that

he himself would under given circumstances incur the same guilt, feels sympathy with the sufferer, and a sort of vicarious fear of his undoing” (Schütze 440). Similarly, instead of stooping to *hamartia*, Justine becomes the recipient of the outlet of society on her, and Sade makes a statement on the human condition through their actions, as well as Justine’s resilience and adamant adherence to her values, principles and virtue. It could be argued that Justine embodies an early version of the Naturalistic hero—passive and suffering:

“The heroes in the naturalistic drama. . . They are not aggressive, but suffering, acted upon, vainly trying to resist the onslaught of fate. . . Our feeling for the hero is that of infinite sympathy and pity. He represents to us the helplessness of humanity face to face with the encroachment of circumstances” (Schütze 435–436).

In a turbulent society where the proletariat strived to defend itself against the aristocracy, it would not have been uncommon at all for a poor girl to have been so mercilessly exploited repeatedly. Justine, therefore, is the recipient of violence and injustice, which she combats by adhering to her virtue and principles. However, it is this persistence of hers that make her miserable, as her unhappiness stems from her stubbornness to abide by the immoral choices she is given. “You cannot escape from the consequences of your past. Every moment of your life, every thought and action, impresses its indelible mark upon your character; you are the victim of the powers that you have invoked in the past” (Schütze 428). Justine becomes a product of her past, her choices to be virtuous and the wretchedness of the society that reprimands and punishes her instead of rewarding her.

### **2.3 Women and Libertinism in *Justine***

“When the French Revolution began in 1789, French women were largely confined to the private sphere,” solely preoccupied with “[d]omestic duty and family obligation” (Spiegel). On the contrary, “the public life was a man’s domain” (Spiegel). Society went through a profound change with the Revolution, though, and, as a result, “the ideas of equality and comradeship. . . captivated women from all backgrounds” (Spiegel). As a result, both the affluent *salonnières*—“daughters of French ministers or the wives of aristocrats [who] had grown up with the privilege of an expansive education . . . [and] wielded a significant amount of indirect influence in the world of politics and diplomacy, [even] though they did not enjoy legal rights” (Spiegel)—and the *sans-culottes*—radical commoners (Spiegel)—became active participants in political events following the French revolution, marking the beginning of a change in the social position of women in Sade’s lifetime.

However, there was one exception to the general rule that connected women to the private sphere: actresses “address[ed] one of the livelier debates in gender history today—the

place of "women in the public sphere" Berlanstein argues (476). "The leading female artists at the Comedie-Francaise (and possibly at some of the lesser theatres) were surely among the most visible and celebrated women of their day" (Berlanstein 475). These women were known as "queens of the stage" (Berlanstein 475) and constituted "archetypes of womanhood" (Berlanstein 475), opposing to Jean-Jacques Rousseau "who recast classical republicanism in such a way that a virtuous citizenry required the domestication and silencing of females, whose contribution to the polity could come only through being self-abnegating mothers" (Berlanstein 477).

*Justine*, on the other hand, handles the position of women in a baffling way: Sade portrays a young woman whom her captors constantly try to constrain, but are met with no success. She roams freely—until her naivety and benevolence lead her to the next villain, that is—having escaped the private sphere that was so traditionally associated with women up until the French Revolution (1789). In her essay *The Sadeian Woman* (1979), Angela Carter maintains that Sade 'put pornography in the service of women, or, perhaps, allowed it to be invaded by an ideology not inimical to women' (qtd in "Typescript draft of *The Sadeian Woman* by Angela Carter"). She highlights that, in his works, "Sade disrupted dominant ideology" ("Typescript draft of *The Sadeian Woman* by Angela Carter"). And yet, the reason why his views concerning women are baffling, is because his choice to feature Justine as the leading character of his novel could be interpreted in two completely different ways: either the choice of a female leading character facilitates the insertion of pornographic material, or Sade honours women by identifying Justine with the absolute virtue he seemed to support throughout the book and by portraying her as a tenaciously strong character fighting for her ideals.

From the very first pages, *Justine* seems to foreground the prevalent notions of Sade's time concerning sexual intercourse and morality. Sade, however, justifies why people gave in to such acts, by putting it down to pleasure overshadowing the moral aspect of the situation: "physical sensations that were delicious enough to extinguish all moral feelings, the shock of which might otherwise be painful" (*Justine* 7). The line is therefore drawn; these who yield to temptations are corrupted, while the ones who abstain are counted among the pious ones. The issue in question is touched on a few pages later, when Dubourg explicitly states that virtuous women are of no use to men or whatsoever, since they can neither pleasure them, nor be a source of income to them:

which flatters men least, that which they consider to be of least importance, that which they despise the most intensely, is the virtue of your sex. In this world,

my child, men value only those things that earn money or bring pleasure. What can we profit from the virtue of women? (*Justine* 16)

Women are thus established in *Justine* as commodities the importance of which is determined by them either pleasing or profiting men: “each individual should fulfil here on earth all the functions for which he or she was designed, and ... women exist solely to serve men’s pleasure” (*Justine* 33). By stating the society’s expectations of women, Sade clarifies the social roles assigned both to Justine and Juliette, regardless of their own attitude to the paths they follow. As Blanchot supports, “the two sisters’ stories are basically identical... everything that happens to Justine also happens to Juliette” (49). The difference is, though, that “from these ills, these agonies, [Juliette] derives pleasure; these tortures delight her... [T]hose uncommon tortures which are so terrible for Justine... for Juliette, [they] are a source of pure delight” (Blanchot 49). What Sade, therefore, foregrounds through the presentation of the two sisters as foils, is not only the stance of the predominantly male society to these two women, but also Justine’s tenacity to hold on to the virtues and ideals she believes in, rather than succumb to becoming a product of society to persevere. In other words, it is not the torments she goes through that make her suffer; it is her own stubbornness to abide by Virtue and live up to her honourable and virtuous past, making the same choice time and again throughout the novel to be virtuous and abstain from the carnality imposed on her. This is a choice that, but for society’s corruption and disregard of women, should not burden a woman the way it burdens Justine.

#### **2.4 The Misfortunes of Virtue: Morality in *Justine***

The leading character, Justine, embodies, according to some critics, Sade himself during his captivity (Philips xxviii). The reasons become clear should we parallel Sade’s life to Justine’s; the torment both were subjected to, the incessant prosecution they both experienced due to beliefs they themselves certainly did not deem as criminal, as well as their never-ending exchange of freedom with captivity and vice versa. If we acknowledge the similarities between Sade and his intellectual child, should we go as far as to assume that they also share this blind faith in virtue? As Philips notes, “[in a] letter written to his lawyer, Reinaud, [Sade] clearly reveals: ‘A novel of mine is currently being printed, but one too immoral to be sent to a man as pious and as decent as you ... It is called *Justine, or the Misfortunes of Virtue*. Burn it without reading it if by chance it falls into your hands. I disown it ...’” (xxi). Given his intentions to detach himself from his own brain child, there is not much we can infer as to where he stands with regards to the views voiced in it.

The primary theme of the novel—the misfortunes of Virtue—is directly addressed by Sade within the opening pages: “[H]owever fair it may be, virtue is the worst option available, when it is too weak to combat vice” (*Justine* 5). Can virtue, indeed, overpower vice? It is this very question Sade explores from cover to cover, with no firm answer ever clearly reached. Whether Sade himself shares Justine’s adamant and unbending views, however, or stands with Juliette, and Justine’s violent interlocutors wishing to be convinced in an internal rhetoric battle, Justine’s role is certainly far more elaborate than a mere manifestation of Sade’s positions and feelings. Justine primarily acts as a foil to every villain she comes across throughout the novel by defending the virtue the existence of which they either scorn, or question altogether. Justine engages in rich rhetoric as to whether virtue, indeed, exists, and if it does, to what extent it can be applied in a society and a world like the one Sade lived in, and prevail over people like the contemporaries who imprisoned him.

The virtue Justine stands for throughout the novel is an ambivalent umbrella term, as she seems to identify it both with abstinence from sexual pleasures, and morality—good deeds, such as helping the ones in need. An association between religion and virtue is established; Justine adheres to religion from cover to cover tenaciously because to her, religion resonates with the virtue she so firmly believes in. To Justine, religion stands for a variety of different aspects: comfort for the torments she is subjected to by the villains, hope for justice to prevail, and the virtue the villains scorn, to name but a few. Justine’s adherence to virtue is as firm as the villains’ sophistries to bring her round. Even though Justine’s arguments lack the philosophical aspect her interlocutors’ bristle with, and are, therefore, nowhere nearly as convincing or intricate as theirs, it is her firm adherence to her beliefs and ideals that makes up for any lack of concise and persuasive argumentation. Her arguments become weak compared to the villains’ eloquent defence of their sinful actions; all the more so by the fact that all their bad deeds go unpunished, her prayers remain unanswered, and every attempt of hers to relieve a fellow-human being entangles her in a new adventure. Justine’s affiliation with religion is incapable of protecting her against their wrongdoings, and she, well aware of that, expects to be rewarded in the afterlife: “[i]f Providence makes my life’s journey difficult, it is to reward me for it in a better world” (*Justine* 26).

It appears, therefore, that Justine’s attachment to religion is presented as an illusion, with no actual effect in the course of events. That is to say, Sade makes it clear that religion exists not to represent virtue, but in absence of virtue; it serves as a way to appease the weak by promising rewards in the afterlife so as to keep them from rebelling and disrupting the balance of the system of power and weakness the entire state runs in. Nevertheless, it is the

very fact that Justine identifies these three aspects—religion, virtue, morality—that makes it ever so difficult to discern to what extent Sade shares the same beliefs as her, considering he was an atheist.

Even so, hardly ever—if ever at all—is her virtue rewarded; most of the times, her benevolent acts become the reason for her to be entangled in a new adventure to her detriment, getting across, thus, the very clear message that little to no avail is there in virtue. As Philips states in reference to the French title *Justine Ou Les Malheurs de la Vertu*, “[m]alheurs’—ill-luck, but also misery, the opposite of ‘bonheur’—seems to imply that virtue is itself a wretched state” (Philips xx).

However, apart from Justine herself, Sade’s characters in *Justine* scorn virtue and morality. Sade seems to seek for an absolute virtue which applies regardless of time and era. The extent to which this quest intrigued the writer can be inferred by the fact that an identical concern is phrased in another work of his, “Eugenie de Franval,” a short story from *The Crimes of Love* (1800). Monsieur de Franval has been planning to seduce his daughter, Eugenie, since the moment of her birth, therefore he strategically schedules her education, and makes sure the girl would not be taught anything on religion. Sade reconstructs this scenario of incest in *Justine*, with Rodin and his daughter, Rosalie, whom he has also consciously kept in the dark with regards to religion; this time, along with his students, whom he also molests: “[h]e has scarcely educated me... he perverts us he stifles in us all the seeds of religion, and that he forbids us to practise all of its rites, and in any case” (*Justine* 80).

The issue of incest seems to be a poignant one in Sade, as it constitutes an argument against the unconditional nature of virtue. When Monsieur de Franval is confronted by Father Clervil about his incestuous relationship with his own daughter, Clervil points out: “Virtue is not an illusion. It is not enough to say that a thing is good here and bad a few degrees of longitude distant to define it absolutely as a crime or a virtue” (“Eugenie de Franval” 272). This is exactly what concerns Sade and prevents him from believing in virtue: the fact that it is not unconditional and, does, actually, vary from place to place, as he states in *Justine*; by bringing up, once again, the example of incest, which may be counted as a sin in some countries, but not in others:

in a neighbouring society, incest is not a crime, those who do not wish to engage in it will not be miserable, and those who do will be happy. Thus, the society that has permitted this act will serve men better than that which has made the same act into a crime. (*Justine* 85)

The same concern regarding the absolute virtue is also voiced in *Juliette* by Noirceuil:

Firstly, it is assumed that notions of justice and morality, to be valid, must be universal and unchanging. Secondly, it is assumed that the moralities of different cultures are so different that no common properties could be identified. Thirdly, the very fact that notions of justice and ethics are the work of men (“elaborated for himself”) is taken to be grounds for not believing in them. (Roche 168)

Therefore, Sade does not altogether reject virtue. On the contrary, he even seems desperate to be convinced of the existence of virtue, but a kind of virtue which prevails unconditionally and is not altered in different countries and climates. Therefore, it is implied that to Sade, this one and only unconditional virtue that would apply to everyone would have absolutely nothing to do with religion, as religion, too, differs from country to country: “virtue is not a world of priceless worth, it is just a way of behaving that varies according to climate and consequently has nothing real about it, and that alone reveals its futility” (*Justine* 84).

Taking that into consideration, it may be confusing that a sense of futility is expressed in *Justine*, not only with regards to the bad deeds, but the good ones, as well. Whatever the behaviour of a person, it all perishes along with them, as Nature did not seem to have any intentions for posterity: “[w]e are merely tiny parts of a vile and brutish matter, and when we die, that is, when we are reunited with other elements of the general mass of things, we shall disappear forever, whatever our behaviour has been” (*Justine* 41). And yet, this notion is countered at the end of the book, when Justine is struck by a lightning and dies, but Juliette, moved by her sister’s troubled life and convictions, gives up on her own sinful life and becomes a nun. As a result, even through such an ambiguous ending, it is clearly demonstrated that Justine’s life and adherence to morality was not in vain.

## **2.5 “Drunk with lust”: Dionysus and Aphrodite in *Justine***

In tandem with the values of Reason and Freedom expressed in the Enlightenment, Jean-Jacques Rousseau maintains that society is a convention people follow so as to be free without undermining other people’s freedom. By forming societies, everyone obeys themselves only, and they are as free as before. That is the social contract (Rousseau qtd in Stylianou 61). In *Emile Ou de l’Education*, Rousseau refers to the innate principle of justice, according to which we should treat others the way we want to be treated. Conscience and feeling constitute the golden rule for a harmonious symbiosis in a society (Rousseau qtd in Stylianou 44).

Based on these reasons, Sade rejects society; at least in its current form. While Rousseau claims that by being virtuous to others, they’ll be virtuous as well (qtd in Didier 447),

Sade rejects this argumentation on the grounds that by being virtuous to others, one gains less than they sacrifice, therefore, there is no reason to (*Justine* 85). In fact, Sade's own views seem closer to Thomas Hobbes' work, who was among the first to contribute to the nascent theories concerning the social contract. According to Hobbes, by nature, a human displays the features of competition, mistrust and desire for glory, and acting upon this nature, humans shall always strive for glory, wealth, money, and knowledge. Therefore, Hobbes notes that people exhibit no innate tendency in harmonic symbiosis, and agrees with Aristotle that symbiotic societies are only created because people are selfish, and not because nature would selflessly lead them to choosing symbiosis. War is avoided due to the misery and destruction it would bring about, neither of which would serve the interests of 'eudaimonia' (Hobbes qtd in Stylianou 94–96). Nevertheless, Hobbes does not criticise the ethical aspect—or the lack of it.

In the ongoing debate of Enlightenment concerning what a society is and how it should be formed for the ideals of the French Revolution—*liberté, egalite, fraternité*—to be achieved, Sade contributed his own views in *Justine*. First of all, rejecting God as the principal power in the universe, Sade claims Nature to be the ruling force behind everything, as God cannot have created something so self-sufficient that does not even require him as a creator: “if Nature drives itself, what is the point of a moving agent? ... [T]here is no God, Nature is sufficient unto itself, and has no need of an author” (*Justine* 41). Sade claims that all human beings were born equal in Nature (*Justine* 27)—even though in various other instances of the book, as mentioned above, he deems women of no more importance than to satisfy men's urges—and any inequality that later on ensues is only as a result of the luck, or the balance that needs to be maintained by having strong and weak people alike to run the machine.

The problem that arises with regards to the creation of an equal society is that, according to Sade, Nature has equipped humans with certain tendencies that are not compatible with the harmonious symbiosis a society stipulates. For example, it is natural for a human being to prioritise themselves at the expense of others: “[t]he fate of others must never count for anything when our well-being is at stake” (*Justine* 26). Such tendencies to secure one's well-being naturally lead to the instinctive need to impose one's self on another being: “it is up to us to correct such whims and to use our talents to counter the usurpations of those stronger than us” (*Justine* 27). As a result, solidarity and empathy for a fellow-human being perishes in sight of one's own welfare: “compassion never stifles Nature among people like us” (*Justine* 106).

Because of that, even unethical actions such as theft are only meant to redress the balance of Providence by having the weak claim what is theirs to climb higher in the rank:

the neutral consequences of theft, and even of its usefulness in the world, since it restored a kind of equilibrium which the inequalities of wealth completely undermined, and on the rarity of punishment, since it was demonstrable that barely two out of twenty thieves were executed (*Justine* 23).

Even murder is stripped of any moral aspect, as Sade highlights that not only do men act upon instincts instilled in them by Nature, they also serve its economy by restructuring and reorganising the natural material that comprise the human flesh:

Whatever we destroy replenishes its powers, renews its energy, but no act of destruction weakens it, none works contrary to it ... Oh, what does it matter to Nature's eternal creation that the mass of flesh which today makes up a biped creature should tomorrow be reproduced as a thousand different insects?

(*Justine* 61)

As a matter of fact, the views expressed here concerning the economy of the human flesh and how it is utilised in the composition of other beings could be paralleled to the regenerative qualities of Dionysus and his connections to life and death. A circle is completed, not far from the one followed all year round with the changing of the seasons.

Such actions, however harmful and detrimental to others, should not be deemed as crimes, according to Sade, as Nature itself stipulates them on the grounds of survival:

He whose thoughts incline to evil should therefore neither hesitate nor be afraid. He must fearlessly commit the crime as soon as he feels the impulse to do so, for he outrages Nature only by resisting (*Justine* 40).

In that aspect, according to Sade, it would be impossible to go against Nature and act in a virtuous manner, as this would be an insult to Nature and the way a human being is made. There are various reasons why it would be considered an insult; first of all, human should not assumed to be strong enough to go against Nature, as "Nature does not place in our hands the means to disrupt her economy" (*Justine* 62). Humans are a creation of Nature and will never be able to prevail, according to Sade, because Nature is far too strong to be overpowered: "how can such actions be crimes? How can one give this name to actions that serve Nature? Does man have the power to commit crimes?" (*Justine* 142) What is more, nothing shameful is to be found in the instincts man is born with, therefore, they should not hinder themselves from acting upon them: "[i]f Nature were offended by these tastes it would not inspire them in us" (*Justine* 141). As a result, it becomes obvious according to Sade that humans cannot co-exist peacefully acting upon virtue that demands that they denounce the urges and instincts they

were born with for the sake of their fellow-human beings: “how can you persuade me that a virtue which combats or is contrary to the passions can be found in Nature?” (*Justine* 85)

By attributing any dangerous tendencies against fellow-humans and sexual urges to Nature, Sade completely decriminalises any such acts. Therefore, he concludes, not only should such urges and actions not be deemed amoral or criminal, they should be justified, as well, because everyone is born with them and they constitute a collective element in the world. Not only should not a man acting upon such urges be punished, they should be pitied the way a disadvantaged person is:

In any case, even if an individual wished to change his tastes, can he do so? Is it in our nature to remake ourselves! Can we become different from what we are? Would you demand it of a deformed man, and is this lack of conformity in our tastes different on a moral level from the imperfection of the deformed man on a physical level? ... Whatever his deviations might be, society should find him no more guilty than the person who, as I have just said, came into the world half-blind or lame, and it is just as unjust to punish or to mock the one as it would be to afflict or to ridicule the other. The man endowed with singular tastes is ill, or if you like, he is a woman suffering from hysterical vapours. Has it ever occurred to us to punish or to torment either of these? (*Justine* 133–137)

Sade here expresses the primitiveness of the human nature and the emergence of the basest instincts: or, in other words, the “Dionysian drunkenness and mystical obliteration of the self” (Nietzsche 10), which Nietzsche described in *The Birth of the Tragedy*.

The connection between *Justine* and the Greek element of Aphrodite is primarily established by references to sexual intercourse as ‘worshipping Venus’ in various instances throughout the novel, and to the female orifices as ‘Venus’ temples’ (*Justine* 33). It is quite early in the narration that Juliette’s ambiguous role in the story is established by the use of the suffix ‘-ange’—French for ‘angel’—in her name: “Madame the Comtesse of Lorsange was one of those priestesses of Venus” (*Justine* 6). While the suffix in question was quite common in novels of that time, it is also highly likely that Sade enjoyed adding it to the name of a corrupted character like Juliette (Didier 439), which sounds ironic in the beginning of the story, but complimentary to its ending. What is additionally established, however, is an association between Juliette—a prostitute—and Aphrodite. Taking Plato’s *Symposium* into account, as well as Pausanias’ reference to Aphrodite Pandemos, the goddess of sexual pleasures, the parallel becomes obvious, and is grounded to later on act as a foil to Justine’s reserved and pious attitude to intercourse and sexual gratification. What Juliette represents here, therefore,

is a woman who embraces her fate of being a female in a world dominated by men, and that these men harbour urges she can help them satisfy—and, thus, survive in such a world. Juliette, in other words, embodies both immorality and libertinism.

All in all, what Nature constitutes in Sade is the fusion of instincts and passions demanding to be fulfilled. Society in *Justine* deprives the individual of its truest call to give in to what it is actually made to obey. It still, however, remains vague to what extent these radical positions are actually in accordance with Sade's true beliefs, or whether they serve as an attempt to decriminalise the perverse ways he sought pleasure and defend himself against his peers frowning upon him. What can surely be concluded by such positions, however, is that in a world such as the one Sade outlines, virtue is neither innate, nor applicable, as it goes against Nature and how it stipulates that a human being behave.

What Sade seems to suggest for this particular issue to be solved is the existence of a libertine society the members of which are mutually bound by pledging their allegiance to libertinism. Sade himself was no stranger to such societies:

“Sade lived at a time when the freemasonry of libertinage and freemasonry itself led to the emergence, in the midst of a society in ruins, of a great number of secret societies, clandestine “colleges” founded on the complicity of passions and on a mutual respect for dangerous ideas. The *Société des Amis du Crime*... forbid its members from indulging in any displays of ferocious passion among themselves, stipulating that these passions can only be satiated in two seraglios which are to be peopled by members of the virtuous classes... “no cruel passions allowed.”...such a compromise cannot satisfy Sade” (Blanchot 47).

Such is the society described in *120 Days of Sodom*. This society is also the one Justine encounters in the monastery Sainte-Marie-des-Bois. The similarity between Marie de la Boie and the society of *120 Days of Sodom* is possibly to be attributed to the fact that Sade mourned the loss of the manuscript of the latter: “His true masterpiece, *Les Cent Vingt Journees de Sodome* was still lost. So he enlarged and spiced up his next best work and turned it into *Justine*” (Schaeffer 411). The order in which this society of libertines is run is described exhaustively in *Justine*, as well: “The whole arrangement, including the colour-coded ribbons and the division of sexual labour, the rules and the alternation of pervasions and philosophical discourse is reminiscent of *Les Cent Vingt Journees de Sodome*” (Schaeffer 472). “[T]he manic preoccupation with symmetry and numbers” that Vara indicates (104) is by no means random. In fact, a distinctive repetition of number 4 and its multiples is observed. This can be associated to Aphrodite and the festival taking place to honour her, *Aphrodisia*, which occurred “shortly

after the beginning of the Attic year on the fourth day of Hekatombaion, since the fourth day of each month was sacred to Aphrodite” (Rosenzweig 15–16). It could be inferred, therefore, that such a society is founded upon the mutual convention that passions prevail and neither can they, nor should they be tamed.

Such a society, though, would not only presuppose the solidarity between villainous males—considering that “[t]he monstrous libertines in the world of Sade are always found in groups” (Gallop 21)—but also the entrapment and ritualistic torture of abducted girls and boys of all ages. It would be, therefore, far from an equal, let alone moral society, encroaching the liberties of other human beings. And yet, it is in such a masculine and unethical world where not only solidarity among villainous men, but solidarity among compassionate women also develops; women who share a similar fate of oppression, and yet strive to help one another survive. This can be seen in various instances in the book; for example, Justine teaches Rosalie about religion (*Justine* 83) and assists Madame de Gernande who suffers her husband’s peculiar exsanguination penchants (*Justine* 174). It even becomes apparent in the way other women treat Justine; for instance, in the Sainte Marie-des-Bois, Armande attempted to receive most of the whipping to minimise Justine’s suffering:

He strikes both enthusiastically, but in order to spare me blows that are becoming much more dangerous for me than for her, my companion is good enough to lower herself and, in so doing, to keep me safe, herself receiving lashes in the process that would have certainly hurt me badly. (*Justine* 133)

Contrary to the spirit of Aphrodite Pandemos in Plato’s *Symposium*, the unity of these women is not achieved through their base needs to be satisfied, but those of men which the women are forced to satisfy. As a result, women unite under the male oppression and vices men force them to indulge in in order to satisfy their pleasure.

Sade’s views never found resonance with his contemporaries in his time. The fact that he was held captive for 27 years, as well as the fact that he spent his last years in an asylum for the mentally unstable is, perhaps, testament to how much of a threat he constituted to his peers.

### **3. *Salome* by Oscar Wilde**

#### **3.1 Victorian Views on Morality and Libertinism**

Queen Victoria, married to Prince Albert and mother of nine children, was the role model of a pious and virtuous family life (*The Victorians*). She set the example for every young woman whose destiny and ambitions in life should involve nothing further than getting married and being a good housewife to her husband and mother to her children. As a result,

there was not much room left for independence and autonomy for women, and there was little to no tolerance for those who deviated from the beaten track; especially those who gave in to carnal temptations outside of wedlock, or even worse, went astray and were unfaithful to their husbands. Coventry Patmore's poem "Angel in the House" (1854–1862), which he dedicated to his wife Emily Augusta Andrews (1824–1862) (Greenblatt and Abrams 1585) has over the years become a symbol of the role of the woman in Victorian society.

The role of woman in Victorian society was crucial. There were many beacons showing women as to how they should behave. A notable example would be "Mrs Beeton's Book of Household Management" (1861) by Isabella Beeton (née Mayson) (1836–1865), which was the Bible to every housewife for running the perfect household. Originating from a family of 21 siblings and having played a large role in their upbringing, Mrs Beeton got married at the age of 21 and by the time of her death at 28, she had given birth to four children. It was, perhaps, no coincidence that Mrs Beeton constituted a role model for the women of the Victorian Era, as Lytton Strachey, "the arch pricker of Victorian pomposity" as Mrs Beeton's biographer Kathryn Hughes points out (4), had remarked on her "strongly resembling Queen Victoria" (Strachey qtd in Hughes 4) and even planned on including her in his *Emminent Victorians* (1918), before he realised he could not gather sufficient information on her and abandoned the scheme altogether (Hughes 4). The lines were very clear for what a woman should or should not be, and the expectations were as clearly specified as possible.

The reason why the role of women in Victorian society was so crucial comes down to James Eli Adams' claim that "Victorian public and private realms were "separate spheres" (Adams 127) The reason for this distinction, as well as the delicate balances woman struck in Victorian society are illustrated by John Ruskin:

The man's power is active, progressive, defensive. He is eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender... The man, in his rough work in open world, must encounter all peril and trial;—to him, therefore, must be the failure, the offence, the inevitable error: often he must be wounded, or subdued; often misled; and always hardened. But he guards the woman from all this; within his house, as ruled by her, unless she herself has sought it, need enter no danger, no temptation, no cause of error or offence. That is the true nature of home—it is the place of Peace (Ruskin 1587–1588).

In a world ever-changing after the Industrial Revolution into an ugly and dangerous place, the man channels all his strength to work in order to sustain his household. The woman, on the other hand, rules this household so that it protects them from the world outside. This is

why her role was crucial and society could not tolerate any deviation from that assigned role. In order to make sure that the household would remain untainted against the vices of the world, one had to be immune to any dangers to the institution of the family and the household, which more often than not manifested as temptations of the flesh.

As a result, to a large extent, morality in the Victorian era was greatly associated with sexual abstinence and purity among the masses (Adams 130). Even though sexual desire was recognised as a “natural instinct,” young men were strongly discouraged from indulging, (Marcus 18), as religion stipulated sperm was meant for procreation rather than self-indulgence (*The Victorians*), which was potentially a threat that would lead one to refrain from the institution of marriage to throw themselves in mindless carnalities and pleasures. As a result, even masturbation was frowned upon, besides the fact that, as Marcus points out, it was regarded as a cause of insanity (21).

Another major reason as to why sex was considered “a universal and virtually incurable scourge” (Marcus 28), and morality and mortification of the flesh became so closely intertwined in the Victorian Era is due to the social and economic implications sexual gratification entailed. In particular, it was closely associated with reproduction and the poverty of the working classes, which Engels famously referred to as “the condition of the working class” (Engels qtd in Adams 131). Therefore, abstinence from sexual activities and gratification was deemed necessary as a means of contraception, as it was impossible for working class families to sustain a large number of members. In order to achieve the aforementioned, therefore, it was imperative that one abstain from any form of sexual activity. Additionally, it was believed that it was a prerequisite for women to experience orgasm in order to conceive, and as a result, women who did not wish to have another child were left either terrified of sexual pleasure or bitterly regretting it afterwards (Mason qtd in Adams 131). It is, therefore, no coincidence that the era in question, as well as the very term ‘Victorian’ has become a “byword for a rigorous moralism centered on sexual repression” (Adams 124). In that sense, “the Malthusian view that the poor were largely responsible for their own predicament, owing to their lack of self-discipline” (Adams 131) implies to what extent the poor were considered amoral. Adams notes that:

“In middle-class representations of working-class men, this failure was typically figured as a tendency to drunkenness and violence. Among the female poor, the failure of self-control was more often identified with promiscuous sexuality” (Adams 131).

Therefore, in such a household, there is no room for a woman as a temptress. In fact, as Marcus notes, “sex is a curse and a torture, and that the only hope of salvation for man lies in marriage to a woman who has no sexual desires and who will therefore make no sexual demands on her husband” (Marcus 32).

And yet, prostitution was a means to secure social mobility and financial stability (Adams 132). However, sexual promiscuity and scandals were not merely restricted to one’s personal choice to act on their own accord. Adams mentions “widespread accounts of female workers sexually exploited by their employers, or by affluent strangers” (Adams 132) which makes it clear it did not merely come down to a woman’s personal choice or immorality.

Such a perception of the woman during the Victorian woman was not singular. The ‘Angel in the House’ went hand-in-hand with the New Woman who emerged towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Stephen Arata describes her as “self-reliant, adventuresome, outspoken, and intelligent – clearly affronted conventional notions of femininity” (62). The New Woman appeared both in society and in novels; a striking example of such a figure would be Rebecca Sharp, an adventuress heroine in William Makepeace Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair* (1847–1848) who acted as foil to meek and shy Amelia Sedley, the stereotypical perception of women during the Victorian Era. Oscar Wilde himself notes an example of Rebecca Sharp in his essay *The Decay of Lying* (1889) (159).

In conclusion, as far as the concept of morality is concerned, it can be inferred that it was quite a rigid one, considering it was massively built upon the life of a monarch. And yet, even if that was how it originally started, it became a convenient notion to keep the masses from making themselves a problem for the higher social classes with the rates of their reproduction or their attempts at temptation which might lead pious family men astray and corrupt the institution of the family and the household not only metaphorically, but literally, as well, by spreading diseases such as syphilis to men and consequently, their wives and families. There was, after all, suspicion that even Mrs Beeton, whose death was attributed to “apoplexy” had actually contracted syphilis from her husband on their honeymoon, as her biographer Hughes points out (Hughes 32). If even such women were threatened, the rest of them had every right to fear. It becomes very clear, therefore, that the morality of the Victorian era had very little to do with concepts such as integrity, empathy, kindness to another human being, but everything to do with sexual mortification and abstinence from temptations and libertinism in an attempt to live up to a role model imposed by Victoria and people raised in similar religious values and fashions. Every temptation was regarded as a threat to family life and preserving it entailed living on principle.

### 3.2 Homosexuality, Hellenism and Scandals in Victorian England

William Chislett remarks that “[Wilde’s] New Hellenism was a passion, a disease, a poison” (Chislett 363). It is highly likely that the reason it was treated as such was the fact that male-on-male desire emerged from interest in Classical Greece during the late Victorian Era (Adams 134). A group of Oxford writers, among whom Pater, focused on Greek sculpture and writings of Plato that foregrounded “not only individual liberty, but a distinctly homoerotic cultural tradition” (Adams 134). There was, therefore, the fear that the forms of Greek art might fuel homoerotic desires (Adams 130). Along with Ruskin and Pater, Wilde was an avid supporter of the Art for Art’s sake movement of the Aestheticism; he was “protest[ing] against [the] ugliness and smugness” (Ellis 191) of his time.

However, the reasons why homosexuality moved on from being celebrated in Classical Greek writings to highly frowned upon in Victorian England and associated with immorality was due to social and economic factors. First of all, given the overall affiliation of the Victorians with the institution of marriage as the intended life path of every self-respecting Christian, it is highly likely that homosexuality could act as a deterrent to a man getting married. Even if he did get married, though, homosexuality would constitute a threat to his household no less than any female temptress would.

It was not unheard of for poor people completely helpless to provide for their family to sell their children in the hopes that a brighter future awaited them thus. Similarly, a number of people resorted to consenting to their children being promoted to prostitution. Hoping to put an end to this, *Pall Mall Gazette* editor W. T. Stead thoroughly researched on the matter with the aid of trusted colleagues, and even went on a stunt, feigning interest to purchase Eliza Armstrong for £5 from her alcoholic mother, Elizabeth. After the transaction was complete and he came into possession of the young girl, Stead wrote *The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon* to shed some light on that social injustice (Stead). So great was the scandal that it propelled the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act by Henry Labouchère, which came into existence in an attempt to protect young boys and girls from the clutches of prostitution. The Section 11 of the Amendment that penalised “acts of gross indecency between men” was allegedly inserted as a precaution that would protect both boys and girls from prostitution; and yet, it cannot be ignored that Labouchère also happened to be a strong opponent to homosexuality. In any case, Section 11 came to be referred to as “the blackmailer’s charter” (Adams 135) because of the scandal that would ensue should a man be exposed to society as homosexual, and the legal implications. Wilde himself was a victim to this, as he mentioned in *De Profundis* that Bosie was careless with a poem Wilde gave him and it ended up in the wrong hands (25).

And yet, in spite of the overall concern with morality and piousness, not every Victorian complied with the morality of their society. In fact, boiling under the cover of *comme-il-faut*, it was impossible for some to suppress their innermost desires; in a way, it was almost as if society was thirsty for scandals. Adams outlines two of the most noteworthy scandals of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century: “[in] 1870... the widely reported prosecution of two male transvestites, Boulton and Park; in 1889, the exposure of a male brothel in Cleveland Street caused a much greater sensation, which included the rumoured involvement of Prince Albert Victor” (Adams 134). To the Victorians, both of the aforementioned scandals signalled the corruption of the working class affecting the more elite classes. Cohen supports that “Wilde’s social crime was to flout the distinctions between the classes” (qtd in Youngs 166). This is case in point of how the omnipresent threat of libertinism hovered over every pious Victorian household—rich, or poor. The scandal was even greater when it involved public figures due to “suffrage,” which, as Codell maintains, “implies that the public is enfranchised to pry into artists’ lives, because these lives determine history and define the age” (Codell 292). In other words, no one was safe.

Another example of this ubiquitous threat was *The Yellow Book*. It was created upon the initiative of Henry Harland, Aubrey Beardsley and various other artists, so that they could accommodate their art which was frowned upon by their contemporaries and rejected as liberal or libertine. As Stanley Weintraub notes, “[t]he color of *The Yellow Book* was an appropriate reflection of the ‘Yellow Nineties,’ a decade in which Victorianism was giving way among the fashionable to Regency attitudes and French influences; For yellow was not only the decor of the notorious and dandified pre-Victorian Regency, but also of the allegedly wicked and decadent French novel” (Weintraub qtd in McGrath). As a result, *The Yellow Book* became identified with corruption and decadence, as “[it] was one sign of collapse in the Victorian cultural synthesis” (Arata 58), bringing society at loggerheads. The fact that it nevertheless sold well, as Arata points out (59), reflects the “hunger for sensation” (Jackson qtd in Arata 59) the Victorians harboured for scandals and while they shied away from them in an attempt to remain pious and virtuous, they craved for them all the same. Had *Salome* actually been performed in 1892 on the English stage as Wilde was planning, it might have been another case in point.

Even though Wilde strikingly refrained from contributing anything to its pages (McGrath), he did become associated with the *Yellow Book* for a number of reasons. First of all, the connection was to be attributed to Aubrey Beardsley and the fact that he produced certain illustrations for *Salome*. Apart from that, a *Yellow Book* comes up in the pages of *The*

*Picture of Dorian Gray* as the book which corrupted Dorian, which is widely considered to be *À rebours* (1884) by Joris-Karl Huysmans's ("The Yellow Book"). Last but not least, Wilde was rumoured to have been caught with a yellow-bound book on his person upon his arrest in 1895; it turned out it was *Aphrodite* by Pierre Louÿs, though ("The Yellow Book").

Given Wilde's association with scandals, his reputation by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century had more to do with libertinism and less with his works. Rather than a renowned playwright, Wilde became the prototype of the "homosexual role," which, as Mary McIntosh argues, serves to carefully point out a deviant presence as a cautionary tale, to keep the rest of society in line, much as the labelling of delinquency contributes to keeping the rest of society lawful. (McIntosh qtd in Adams 135). This is why, as Ellis highlights, Wilde becomes "a scapegoat for much that was in the hearts of men and women" (Ellis 192), even if his involvement in scandals was by no means a singular case in Victorian society. And yet, apart from society's aversion to the libertinism Wilde arguably stood for, and the morality that was threatened by people like him, there is also the aspect of "the courageous man who stayed and faced his doom and refused to defame his accusers" (Ellis 192). While this aspect of Wilde was less widespread in his own time and age than it is now—and the full publication of *De Profundis*, where he narrates his own side of the story, might have had a lot to do with it—it would be, perhaps, wiser to look into his life details a bit further so as to figure out who the man "now adored as a sort of fantastic god or despised as a decadent demon" is (Ellis 192). In other words, who is Oscar Wilde, the man whose play *Salome* was dreaded even before the 1895 trial—before it even came to be on stage?

### 3.3 Oscar Wilde

Cohen argues, that "Wilde was by profession a literary man, and that it was his writing as much as his conduct that got him into trouble" (Cohen qtd in Kaplan 113). And yet, there was a time when, thanks to his academic career and his literary works, Wilde enjoyed the acknowledgement of his contemporaries before his name became associated to scandals. Wilde's education included two years at Trinity College, Dublin and a fellowship to Magdalen College, Oxford (Kaplan 116), where his college record in Classics was among the highest and "he was an "A" student. (Chislett 360). According to Kaplan, he became known there as "a witty and extravagant defender of radical attitudes towards art and life" (Kaplan 116). Wilde had also lectured a great deal both in England and in the United States of America, therefore establishing himself as a promising and prominent literary figure (Kaplan 116) and an avid supporter of the doctrine of 'Art for Art's sake' and the New Hellenism (Chislett 357) which went against the moralizing tendencies of his contemporary Victorian society (Kaplan 116).

As it can be inferred from his studies and his travels, Wilde was not only up to date with the latest nascent literary tendencies of his time, but he also happened to be quite immersed in the studies of the Classic Greek canon, which seeps through his works in the form of quotations, and comparisons between the Greek tradition and works of his own time and age—not exclusively limited to English ones. In fact, even in *De Profundis*, which he wrote in prison in fragments, within the limit of one hour a day and without any further sources to consult, one can find countless such references, and even citations in Ancient Greek, which can only allude to a highly educated figure. As a result, the symbolic imagery that strongly alludes to Ancient Greek background, be it conscious or inadvertent insertions, was by no means random. *Salome* is no exception.

### 3.4 *Salome*

Even in a society where the New Woman emerges, it is a society not ready for a play like Wilde's *Salome*. Nearly fifteen years after Ibsen's *Dollhouse* (1879) openly challenged society by questioning the position of the woman as more than a commodity merely changing ownership from father to husband, *Salome* would be bound to scandalise Victorian society to its foundation by going as far as to negate the woman's identity as a faithful, pious and virtuous Angel in the House that holds the entire family and household together. On the contrary, it would assign her the attributes of a seductress manipulating her subordinates and superiors not by appealing to her social ranking or the wealth that ensues thereof, but her beauty, charm and, most importantly, awakening of sexual desires and every intention—and capacity—to indulge in them. And yet, it should be noted that in the preface of *The Picture of Dorian Grey*, Wilde states that “All art is quite useless” (1), meaning that under no circumstances is it created to transform society—one of the basic principles of the Art for Art's sake movement. Even so, the Victorian household is no less threatened; the corruption of the woman spreads on to the males like the dreaded syphilis and soon, the entire kingdom is ruled by the corrupted and immoral. Bearing these in mind, it would become more than obvious why a play like *Salome* would be so controversial and scandalous in Victorian society even three years before Wilde's notorious sentence to two years of imprisonment for “acts of gross indecency between men.” Yet the elements of *Salome* that would scandalise Wilde's Victorian contemporaries had the play been approved for production in England do not stop there.

### 3.5 Production Details

The backstage details of the production of *Salome* constitute a part of the analysis as much as the actual play does. Imagery is largely connected to it even before the play is put on stage. Gabriele Rippl argues that Pater and Wilde:

“rejected photography for their literary work, recognizing on some level the all-too manifest status of photographs as mass commodity”. In his short story “The Real Thing” Pater’s contemporary, the Anglo-American novelist Henry James, spelled out why this was the case: photography merely represents the surface of things; real art, however, investigates what is underlying the surface, it interprets life” (344).

This could be the reason why Wilde turned to Beardsley for illustrations of *Salome* which were published in the latter’s debut in the London journal *The Studio* in 1893 (Primorac) and in *Salome’s* English edition of 1894 (Primorac): “Apparently feeling he had found a kindred soul in Beardsley, he soon delivered him a copy of *Salome* with the inscription, “For Aubrey: for the only artist who, beside myself, knows what the dance of the seven veils is, and can see that invisible dance.” (Wilde qtd in Primorac). The illustrations in question, according to Primorac, do not fall short of delivering a very clear message of female empowerment that men in Victorian society could not have felt very comfortable with; it becomes clear that *Salome’s* force was unhindered, even if the play was deprived of the very chance of performance to the British public.

“The fact that the greatest tragic actress of any stage now living saw in my play such beauty that she was anxious to produce it, to take herself the part of the heroine...[is] naturally, and always will be, a source of pride and pleasure to me” Wilde stated (qtd in Ross viii). The performance of *Salome* starring Bernhardt that Wilde spoke of in this letter to *The Times* and “look[ed] forward with delight” (Wilde qtd in Ross viii) never happened, though. Two weeks after the beginning of rehearsals, they were interrupted by Lord Chamberlain Edward F. Smyth Pigott, who refused to grant the play with a licence, claiming this decision of his was on the grounds that it was illegal for a play to feature biblical characters on stage (Tydeman and Price 16). The actual reasons, however, had very little to do with this claim. In a private letter to Spenser Posonby, Pigott confessed his disapproval of the play was to be attributed to a disturbing blend of female sexuality and religious profanity (Dierkes-Thrun 4). He noted that “[Salome] does kiss [Iokanaan’s] mouth in a paroxysm of sexual despair” and refers to the language of the play as “half biblical half pornographic”. In fact, far from surprisingly, he shared his fears concerning the play’s scandalous reception: “imagine the average British

public's reaction of it" (Pigott qtd in Thurn 4). "The interference of the Censor has seldom been more popular or more heartily endorsed by English critics," Ross remarks (Ross vii). Rippl, on the other hand, states that "Salome fascinated the Victorians" (Rippl 341); therefore, it is highly likely that what Pigott was actually afraid of was not that the audience would be scandalised by the play, but that they would be swayed by it and stoop to sin. The concern is far from innovative; as a matter of fact, it echoes Plato's views on how theatre is a condemnable form of representation, as it gives rise to passions and deforms even moral people (Plato 75–76). This is an intrinsic part of English literary tradition, as the Puritans aligned themselves with it during the 16<sup>th</sup> century, rejecting, therefore, theatre as a dangerous art.

After the decision of Lord Chamberlain, in an interview with English and French journalists, Wilde famously declared that he would give up his citizenship to become a French citizen (Dierkes-Thrun 5); in jest, as Ross clarifies (Ross vii). Ironically enough, had he done so, Wilde could have avoided his 1895 trials and subsequent imprisonment, as Dierkes-Thrun observes (5). Eventually, he did go to France and spent his last years there; but only when it was too late.

A ban was imposed on the play on public stage in Britain and it was not lifted until 1931 (Tydeman and Price 1). Adamant that no one else should play *Salome* but Bernhardt, Wilde offered her the part anew in 1895 from prison (Tydeman and Price 23-24); however, Bernhardt refused (Dierkes-Thrun 5). *Salome* was eventually performed in *Theatre d'Oeuvres* in 1896, but not with Bernhardt. As it can be inferred from the dates, Wilde never got the chance to see it, as it was performed during his imprisonment; and neither did he see *Salome* performed during his lifetime (Dierkes-Thrun 6). *Salome* may have gained in popularity in Russia, China and Japan; in England, though, it was only accessible to the public through book editions and private performances (Dierkes-Thrun 6).

Even though Wilde was overall grateful to the director of *Salome*, Aurélien Lugné Poë, he was reportedly dissatisfied with the cast decision (Dierkes-Thrun 6), and in particular, the assignment of the role of the Page in love with the Young Syrian to a female actress named Suzanne Després in an attempt to conceal the implied instance of homosexuality. (Tydeman and Price 29). The way Després delivered the "dangerous passage" as Tydeman and Price call it (29) reading "Il était mon frere et plus qu'un frere" (Wilde qtd in Tydeman and Price 29) left the audience so bewildered, they did not suspect it had been altered. Wilde's disappointment with the change in question can be inferred from the fact that Ross asserted that no female actor play the male roles, probably referring to the Page and not Herodias' seven slaves also played by women (Ross qtd in Tydeman and Price 29-30). And yet, in spite of the

obvious attempts of Wilde's peers to hush the controversial and scandalous elements of *Salome*, the symbolism of *Salome* is so elaborately concocted, that only a ban of the entire play altogether would have been efficient in protecting the masses from its interpretation and influence.

Richard Aldington, a prominent figure of the Imagism movement in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, argued that Wilde wrote symbolist verse “years before the symbolist movement began” (Aldington qtd in Tydeman and Price 3). While the validity of this statement is doubtful, considering Wilde was actually a contemporary of figures representing the Symbolism movement, such as Stéphane Mallarmé (1842–1898) and Paul Verlaine (1844–1896), it is possible that Symbolism in the case of Wilde was not merely an artistic influence he picked up from his French peers that he held in such high regard, but a necessity to persevere in England against a conservative public who would show no tolerance to art threatening the cherished institution of household and family life. The influence Wilde must have undoubtedly picked up from the French with regards to Symbolism, however, is that the symbols constitute “a cypher to some higher mystery in life” (Russ 38).

Peter Dickinson remarks that through all the roles Wilde had assumed during his lifetime with Machiavellian cunning, it was truly impossible to discern which one of them was the real Oscar Wilde: “Will the real Oscar Wilde stand up?” (Dickinson qtd in Dierkes-Thrun 6). It seems that this was exactly Wilde's intention if we look into *The Critic as Artist* (1891) more closely, where Wilde supports that Shakespeare revealed a lot more about himself in his plays, where he mentioned nothing of his person, than in *The Sonnets*, where he confesses his ever-lasting love to The Fair Youth: “Man is least himself when he talks in his own person. Give him a mask, and he will tell you the truth” (*The Critic as Artist* 225). It is impossible to decide whether Wilde did, indeed, show a lot more of himself in the controversial pages of *Salome*, or in his bitter *De Profundis* addressed to Lord Douglas from prison a couple of years later. What can be inferred, though, was that concealing himself behind symbols and the ambiguity of keeping implicit what should stay implicit by leaving much unsaid was a necessity to survive and pass around in English society, without refraining from getting his messages across and taunting his audiences, though. On a similar tone, Dickinson notes 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” (Dickinson qtd in Dierkes-Thrun 7). In that case, it is possible that, be it intentionally or subconsciously, in an attempt to sidestep criticism, what Wilde revealed in his works was not merely bits and pieces of himself, but a mirror for his audiences to reflect themselves. As a result, the suppressed masses that would watch *Salome*

would project their dormant desires on the play, on par with Wilde's assertion that "Salome was a mirror in which everyone could see themselves: the artist art, the dull dullness, the vulgar vulgarity" (Wilde qtd in Ross ix). This was, perhaps, what Pigott bore in mind and wished to foil by refusing to grant *Salome* a licence.

### 3.6 Dionysus, Aphrodite and Apollo: *Salome* as an Ancient Greek Tragedy

Music was an indispensable element contributing to Salome's inspiration. Upon relating the story of Salome to a group of French writers, Wilde returned to his lodgings and recorded everything in a conveniently blank notebook. Afterwards, he went back to Grand Café and informed the leader of the orchestra "I am writing a play about a woman dancing with her bare feet in the blood of a man she has craved for and slain. I want you to play something in harmony with my thoughts" (Wilde qtd in Tydeman and Price 16). As a result, "[w]ild and terrible music" (Tydeman and Price 16) inspired him to finish *Salome*.

What is intriguing in this case is that, just like Samuel Beckett writing *Waiting for Godot* (1953) in French because his limited grasp of the language assisted him relate the play by stripping it of any unnecessary or redundant additions, Wilde did not write *Salome* in his mother tongue, but preferred French for a number of reasons. This decision, according to critics such as Ian Andrew MacDonald and Elizabeth Richmond Garza, adds yet another layer to be decoded for an accurate interpretation of the play to be achieved. Even though Wilde stated Lord Douglas was the official translator in the 1894 dedication—"To Lord Alfred Bruce Douglas, the translator of my play" (Wilde qtd in Dierkes-Thrun 5)—he later on accounts for his decision in *De Profundis*: "You would be much hurt, perhaps almost humiliated, at having your work sent back to you like a grounded schoolboy's exercise... I knew quite well that no translation, unless one done by a poet, could render the colour and cadence of my work in any adequate measure" (*De Profundis* 14). As he was obviously dissatisfied with Lord Douglas' translation of *Salome*, he eventually went through the translation himself, despite stating Lord Douglas to have been the official translator. The fact that the two men disagreed and quarrelled over the translation of *Salome* can hardly help matters, adding, therefore, an extra layer to be lifted for interpretation to be achieved. Nevertheless, all this begs the question as to why Wilde had originally written *Salome* in French, as his decision appears to be by no means a random one.

An obvious, perhaps, explanation as to why French was the chosen language would be that Bernhardt, the actress Wilde had entrusted the leading role of Salome to didn't speak English (Powell qtd in Dierkes-Thrun 73). However, Wilde was adamant when stating that under no circumstances was *Salome* written for Bernhardt (Wilde qtd in Ross viii). Even though

Wilde's mother tongue was English, Wilde stated that to him, "there are only two languages in this world: French and Greek" (Wilde qtd in Eells 3). Emily Eells points out that "[d]eciphering his handwriting indicates how he combined his love of both French and Greek, as the "e"s and "a"s of his French words imitate the Greek epsilon and the lower case alpha" (Eells 5). And there, in the form of Visual Poetry (Kennedy and Gioia 228), there is, perhaps, the first visual in-text insertion of the Greek element.

Eells additionally highlights that Wilde "uses the French language as if it were a system of signs divorced from their semantic meaning, creating as pure a musical notation as verbal language can allow" (Eells 12). In other words, by writing *Salome* in French, Wilde inserts the element of music in the play. In his dedication of *Salome* to Edmund Gosse, Wilde refers to the French language as "an instrument of music" (Wilde qtd in Eells 2). Should that be the case, the music in *Salome* begins well before the Dance of the Seven Veils, on par with Pater's views that "all art aspires towards the condition of music" (Pater qtd in Eells 3). Another point to be considered is that by choosing the French language to incorporate the element of music in speech, what Wilde also achieved, is embellishing the speech in a way facsimile to an Ancient Greek tragedy (ἡδυσμένῳ λόγῳ); not through rhythm, as Ancient Greek tragedy stipulated, but melody. That would be one of the many similarities to be traced between *Salome* and Ancient Greek tragedy, all of which unravel in tandem with Wilde's New Hellenism. The selection of French language for this play is yet another veil to be lifted for its interpretation, but still constitutes an indispensable element contributing to the symbolism, the atmosphere and the aesthetics of *Salome*.

The Greek element in *Salome* does not only lie in symbolism, but is also reflected upon the very way *Salome* was composed, and its resemblances with Ancient Greek tragedy. Given Wilde's educational background of Classic Greek studies, it would only make sense if he echoed the Greek canon, be it consciously or unconsciously.

The definition of tragedy according to Aristotle is the following:  
 ἔστιν οὖν τραγωδία μίμησις πράξεως σπουδαίας καὶ τελείας μέγεθος  
 ἐχούσης, ἡδυσμένῳ λόγῳ χωρὶς ἐκάστου τῶν εἰδῶν ἐν τοῖς μορίοις, δρώντων  
 καὶ οὐ δι' ἀπαγγελίας, δι' ἐλέου καὶ φόβου περαίνουσα τὴν τῶν τοιούτων  
 παθημάτων κάθαρσιν (1449b-1450b).

In *Poetics*, Aristotle defines tragedy as a "serious and complete action" which should exhibit some certain magnitude, embellished speech of rhythm and melody, be delivered in acting rather than reciting and put the spectators through pity and terror so that they would experience catharsis in the end (Aristotle 92).

Similarly, *Salome* displays the events leading up to the basic element of plot in the play, Iokanaan's decapitation, unravelled on par with the Dramatic Unities of Time, Space and Action, which could be summarised as a feast in the palace in the evening. Critics have noted the insertion of the subplot of the Young Page, which, however, contributes to the events leading up to the Action of the decapitation; as Corneille suggests, subplots are acceptable as long as they assist the completion of the major action by serving as preparation and keep the spectator in a pleasant suspense, as well (288). In this case, therefore, the insertion of this subplot acts both as a foreshadowing of the tragic deaths of Iokanaan and Salome that will follow, and as a foil to how Salome handles feelings of passion; while he directs their destructive force upon himself, Salome channels it on Iokanaan.

The tragedy, according to Aristotle, should include spectacle, song, diction, characters, plot and reasoning (Aristotle 93). While Wilde's *Salome* does, indeed, include the majority of these elements, what is distinctly absent is the song. As discussed above, Wilde's selection of the French language might act as some sort of compensation for this lack.

Another condition that needs to be met for tragedy, as Aristotle supports, is the inclusion of kings and queens of good reputation and fortune (Aristotle 98)—a condition which is only partially met in *Salome*, given the strong implications of incest—but as moral characters whose *hamartia* and the change of fortune that ensues is not owing to vice or wickedness. The majority of the characters presented in *Salome* are morally ambiguous: the seductress princess Salome, the incestuous royal couple, the Young Page insinuating forbidden homoerotic desire are all characters largely controversial in the Victorian timeframe. But still, as Terry Eagleton indicates, not all protagonists morally speak for everyone, as Aristotle suggests they should (Eagleton 80). The condition of ethical characters may be a prerequisite not only for the didactic tone of the tragedy, but for the eventual catharsis at the end of the play as well, as Eagleton highlights that the viewer cannot experience pity for the “morally repulsive” (Eagleton 80).

In the case of *Salome*, though, the catharsis is debatable, since Salome borders on victim and villain here—a child-woman, as Tydeman and Price call her (5). As a result, the ending remains ambiguous: whether the Tetrarch's decision to kill her in the end reflects his change of heart to morality, her relief of passions that could neither be suppressed nor combated, or a hint that society can be a better place now that such people have been eliminated, it is all open to interpretation.

The most significant aspect of Ancient Greek tragedy that one can find in *Salome*, though, is the *praxis*. Aristotle defines the action of the tragedy as *spoudaia*, however, it is not

quite clear as to what action exactly would be deemed as such. Kostas Boyiopoulos suggests that an action of that magnitude may be related to *polis*, or alternatively, *eros*:

Although Aristotle points towards but does not explicitly mention the themes fit for tragedy, we can infer that, as they arise from *hamartia*, they are constructed around moral dilemmas of high stakes concerning the *oikos* or the *polis*. Those themes are worthy, or *spoudaia*... In *Salome*, Wilde achieves the tragic grandeur of *spoudaia*, by focusing not on traditional serious, lofty themes of collective responsibility that concern *hoi polloi*, but egotistical and (self-) destructive *eros* that concerns the conscious choices of the individual (Boyiopoulos 142).

The moral dilemmas we are presented with here concern the human nature and the way it is susceptible to temptations and passions; in particular, Wine, Women and Song, or Dionysus, Aphrodite and Apollo, as Crowley specifies. In other words, the theme of *Salome* would be human against Nature and Society; their own nature that urges them to seek out these pleasures, and society which stipulates that anything of this sort falls into libertinism and one should not stoop to it but adhere to morality.

Religion (*Salome* 4-5) is presented as a cause of dispute with a chorus of characters juxtaposing where their religions convert and where they divert, even if they all agree that it is highly unlikely that Iokanaan has actually seen God, which trivialises his fierce stance and faithfulness to preach on His behalf, stripping his actions of any meaning and significance. These indefinite and immaterial references to religion work in unison so as to act as a foil to the materialism of the Greek Olympian gods forcefully forged in the background through objects and all sorts of connotations, gradually casting light to the here and now; a concoction of Wine, Women and Song that looms as a silent threat of temptation in the background as the play unfolds.

While a biblical play with clear allusions to *Salome* and John the Baptist, Wilde's *Salome* also contains a number of symbols which strongly allude to the Gods of Olympus and comprise a background of Greek symbols. The Angel of Death who establishes his omnipotent presence quite early in the play could be associated to Hades and the underworld he rules in Greek mythology. Even the foreshadowing references hinting at death is a technique straight from the Homeric epics. In this way, Wilde aligns himself with Pater who claimed that beauty is extremely fragile and walks hand-in-hand with Death (Pater qtd in Rippl 338).

Additionally, the incest the Tetrarch and Herodias are accused of stooping to (*Salome* 4-5) may have been “an intolerable threat to Victorian domesticity” (Adams 131), but it alludes

to the incestuous relationship between Zeus and Hera; in fact, even the fact that the Tetrarch conquered Herodias against her will echoes Zeus' stubborn scheme to seduce Hera: "It was thou didst snatch me from his arms (sic)" (*Salome* 29). The connotation between the royal couple in *Salome* and the two Greek gods is all the more reinforced by how Herodias also seems to behave like the jealous goddess when she suspects the Tetrarch's desire for her daughter, and powerfully evoked in the viewer's mind with the Tetrarch's mention of the peacocks (*Salome* 39-40), an animal traditionally connected with Hera. Even the jewellery gems (*Salome* 41) that Herod promises Salome in order to make her revoke her decision to ask for Iokanaan's head acts as a shout-out to Hephaestus, the craftsmen of the gods.

Since the very beginning of *Salome*, the moon constitutes a ubiquitous element: "[t]he moon is shining very brightly (*Salome* 3). However, its presence is not only an aesthetic addition to set the atmosphere for the play. The moon bears a number of connotations and, as a result, works not only as a strong symbol, but an element promoting the plot and actively participating in the unravelling course of events as well.

First of all, with regards with the Greek element of the play, the moon is associated to Artemis, the Greek goddess of hunting who remained chaste and stubbornly refrained from involving herself with men. Wilde hinted to all of those features in *Salome* when he compares the moon to Iokanaan in terms of their chastity: "I'm sure he is chaste as the moon" (*Salome* 14). The association with Artemis, though, is not one Wilde was the first one to insert—if that was, indeed, his purpose. Had this been the symbolism he was tapping into, he was merely reflecting a part of English tradition in which Elizabeth I was also compared to the moon, yet again on the grounds of her chastity and reluctance to involve herself with men. Sir Walter Raleigh's poem *The Ocean, To Cynthia* (ca. 16<sup>th</sup> century) is case in point, and yet not the only one. The connection between Elizabeth I and the moon is sustained in Shakespeare's works, as well: from plays such as *Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Romeo and Juliet* to the *Sonnets* (The mortal moon hath her eclipse endured—Sonnet 107). Therefore, a strong allusion is created between Elizabeth I, a female monarch sought after by a circle of courtiers, and with power of life and death over them all, and Salome. Just as Elizabeth I dallied with the courtiers lusting after her but never gave in, holding, thus, the strings to a powerful game of diplomacy, so does Salome toy with the Young Syrian and the Tetrarch just to gain access to Iokanaan. The difference here is that the princess, even though not fully awakened to her dormant desires, is not altogether a stranger to them and impulsively rushes to appease them by acting upon them, rather than abstaining from them, as the Virgin Queen reportedly did.

The aforementioned symbolism of the moon standing for Elizabeth I functions on a meta-theatrical level, as well. Just like the monarch attended the theatre gloriously seated behind the actors and the stage, gazing at the show and gazed at by the Groundlings and the nobles in the galleries alike, an ever-present authority for all to be reminded of, similarly, the Victorians had to hide between seemingly perfect families, abstinence from temptations and pious lives to abide by the virtuous and moral way of living their monarch had instilled on them and set an example of. Nevertheless, a transgression is noted here. Even the moon betrays its bonds with chastity when it is compared to “A mad woman seeking everywhere for a lover” (*Salome* 20), heralding, thus, Princess Salome’s ‘lunacy’ and imminent defeat to her passion for Iokanaan.

And yet, the moon in this case is not only reminiscent of an indispensable part of canon; it actually bridges the English tradition to Wilde’s era. Chris Francescani points out that “[i]n the 16th century, the Swiss physician, astrologer and occultist Paracelsus wrote that “mania has the following symptoms: frantic behaviour, unreasonableness, constant restlessness and mischievousness”, not far from the behaviour Salome exhibits in the play. Violence and crime have been strongly associated to the moon and the connection stretches even as back as the 19<sup>th</sup> century when, in fact, lawyers tapped into the “guilty by reason of the full moon” defence to support that their “lunatic” clients should not be held accountable for committing crimes under the influence of the full moon (Kantor). Similarly, in *Salome*, the constant insertion of the moon and its bright light upon the characters may act as more than a mere aesthetic reminder and actually serve the purpose of reinforcing Salome’s “innocence” and attributing her erratic behaviour to the inevitable rise of her suppressed subconscious and female nature.

Consequently, having established a background full of Greek associations and bridging *then* and *now*, Wilde can now weave the triptych of the transcendence and transgression of Dionysus, Aphrodite and Apollo, a triptych of forbidden ecstasy which culminates in the Dance of the Seven Veils. This dance heralds the awakening of primal instincts and carnal desires as opposed to how they lay dormant in Iokanaan.

The wine is yet another omnipresent feature throughout *Salome*. “Herodias has filled the cup of the Tetrarch” (*Salome* 5), as the first soldier mentions, and his intoxication is clearly hinted at during the play in the way he speaks and expresses himself. He falls into repetitive patterns—“But let us not talk of that matter. I do not desire to talk of it... Let us not speak of this matter.” (*Salome* 29), contradicts himself—“I am very happy, never have I been so happy... I am sad tonight. Yes, I am passing sad tonight” (*Salome* 32–33) and his stream of thoughts occasionally sounds disarrayed to those around him:

HEROD: [The moon] is like a mad woman, is she not?

HERODIAS: No; the moon is like the moon, that is all. (*Salome* 20).

Ironically enough, he sounds no less puzzling or convoluted than Iokanaan, who abstains from any sort of vice and only speaks of God.

A further layer of symbolism hides in the wines themselves, though. Upon the law of the three, which is an indispensable element of Greek folk songs, the Second Soldier lists wine of three sorts: from Samothrace, Cyprus, and Sicily. Stefania Arcara highlights that “the ‘wine of Sicily’ signals the climax in the list of the Tetrarch’s fabulous wines (‘that wine is red like blood’)” (Arcara 142). Apart from the obvious connection of each and every one of these places with Greece, Arcara casts light on “a relevance of Sicily in the discursive contexts of Hellenism and homosexuality in Victorian Britain” (135), a connotation probably not lost on Wilde, who had visited the place twice (Arcara 135). “Wine” as Gus Willoughby indicates, is “the symbol of Dionysus and the art of viticulture he taught to men and women” (109). In *Salome*, wine becomes identified with Dionysus and the carnal, bestial instincts the characters struggle to keep under wraps as the night progresses and the moon shines above them. Dionysus stands for the primitive element that comprises the human being and its ties to nature (Pater 13), reflecting the unquenchable urges that Sade portrayed in *Justine* as impossible to be soothed with reason or appeals to morality.

“By woman came evil into the world” (*Salome* 16), Iokanaan remarks when addressing Salome. Before her very entrance on the stage, Salome is depicted as a beautiful woman; her beauty is reflected upon her tantalising The Young Syrian—“How beautiful is the Princess Salome tonight!” (*Salome* 3)—and Herod—“Why does the Tetrarch look at me all the while with his mole’s eyes under his shaking eyelids?... I know not what it means. Of a truth I know it too well” (*Salome* 8). Upon her entrance on stage, Salome has already been established as a beautiful woman; not as a helpless prey waiting to be conquered, though. Salome seems aware both of her beauty and the passions she inspires in men around her, which becomes evident when she manipulates The Young Syrian so as to gain access to Iokanaan (*Salome* 12) and Herod by promising the Dance of the Seven Veils (*Salome* 34). The Dionysus element is enhanced by the one of Aphrodite, arousing passions and feelings in men which cannot be tamed.

Salome’s motives with regards to Iokanaan in Wilde’s version constitute a groundbreaking element. While the insertion of Salome being in love with John the Baptist was not new and had come up in previous versions of the story, Tydeman and Price note that “Wilde’s originality lies in having his princess overcome with pure physical desire for Iokanaan rather

than be moved by admiration for his fine character or fearless preaching” (Tydeman and Price 8–9). In other words, the physical aspect becomes an indispensable element of the plot and the ensuing decapitation of Iokanaan is to be very clearly attributed to the fierceness of Salome’s unfulfilled desires. There is no doubt in the reader’s mind that the reason why Salome requested for his head is because he rejected her. Tydeman and Price further highlight that Salome is “[n]o longer made the instrument of her mother’s destructive designs on the saint” (Tydeman and Price 9) and therefore clearly makes this decision on her own accord.

Coriat takes it a step further to account for Salome’s actions by basing them on the recently coined term of sadism in Wilde’s era, referring to Salome’s request of Iokanaan’s head as a “sadistic episode,” clarifying that “[Wilde] portrays the daughter of Herodias as a sadist and her desire for the head of John the Baptist is not for religious or political revenge, but to fulfil her sadistic desires” and in fact, makes a correlation between the scene in question in *Salome* and a scene from *The Picture of Dorian Gray* where Dorian experienced a “‘horrible fascination’ in reading about the tortures and the ‘awful and beautiful forms of those whom Vice and Blood and Weariness had made monstrous or mad’” (Wilde qtd in Coriat). The claim would not be insubstantial if one were to take Helen Davies’ comment into account, that “Wilde reportedly composed *Salome* after reading Krafft-Ebing’s *Psychopathia Sexualis*” which had been published a couple of years earlier in 1886 (Davies 60). Should we, indeed, acknowledge this incident as a sadistic episode and further connect it with Didier’s views that sadism is exercised from the inferior to the superior and not vice versa (449), it could be interpreted in the overall spirit of the late Victorian era as an attempt on behalf of the woman to make herself equal with the man.

This is one of the ways in which *Salome* was quite an innovative play for its time. Unlike Ibsen’s *Dollhouse*, which made a statement concerning the position of women only in social terms, Wilde is daring enough to take it a step further and explore the female desire and sexuality by featuring a woman plagued by desire for Iokanaan and the only possible outlet she directs herself to is not shame, abstinence or guilt, but fulfilment. It is not, however, a poor woman, as it may have been typically expected, given the correlation between poverty and immorality, but a royal princess, which, in turn, has two connotations. First of all, she escapes the fate of the working-class woman who succumbs to prostitution and carnalities in order to secure her livelihood. Salome’s pursuit of Iokanaan is dictated by a quest of pleasure rather than livelihood. Secondly, she does not pursue intimacy for the sake of reproduction, as society stipulated at that time, but in quest for intercourse as a response to her primal

instincts. Therefore, Salome escapes the Victorian stereotype of the suppressed woman; she is empowered.

Were we to read this scene rid of any social implications and interpretations, though, what is clearly displayed here is the loss of control in the face of the power of the temptation. Temptation seems to be of paramount importance in the Victorian Era, as it directly resonates with the overall sexual suppression people were subjected to and the frustration there ensued. Tydeman and Price additionally note that Herod rushes into making the promise sealing Iokanaan's fate, depriving, therefore, the dance of its primary motive: seduction (Tydeman and Price 9). As a result, Herod was acting upon temptation, which is a step before seduction. *Salome* is not about seduction or manifestation of desires because that would completely go against the Victorian morality; it is about temptation. Tetrarch is forced to have Iokanaan decapitated because he gave his word. Temptation as a topic is more appropriate for the Victorian Era.

In *Salome*, the double nature of Aphrodite as described in Plato's *Symposium* is challenged. On the one hand, the desire that is to be found in the hearts of men and women alike and Aphrodite Pandemos stands for is present in *Salome*. In fact, Salome's desire overshadows The Young Syrian's or Herod's in intensity, destructiveness and significance, as it becomes the main driving force that propels the plot to its climax and completion. Nevertheless, this passion does not evoke feelings of empathy and mutual understanding in the characters, nor does it bring them closer. In combination with the emergence of the Dionysus element, the primitive side of them takes over and throws the characters down the pit of madness as the play spirals to an end. The Young Syrian takes his own life; Salome, completely undaunted and unabashed by the self-destructive act, seeks Iokanaan's head in retaliation for her unreciprocated lust; and Herod abides much to his chagrin.

On the other hand, the symbolism of Aphrodite Urania also lurks in the background of *Salome*. By re-establishing Salome from the object of desire to the subject of desire as the play draws to a closure, completely unfazed to the admiration she attracts from the male characters of the play, she glorifies Iokanaan's body in long monologues portraying its beauty. The law of the three is similarly followed here as well—body, hair, mouth—pointing to the climax of “I have kissed your mouth, Iokanaan” that Beardsley also illustrated in his collection of *Salome*. Therefore, by having the female agent stand back and praise the male body by fragmenting it in eloquent utterances before its actual decapitation, Wilde once again bridges his Victorian time and age with the English Sonnetearing tradition. This is achieved not only by alluding to the *amor purus* the Elizabethan sonneteers explore by dissecting the female body in their sonnet

lines (Kessler), but also the subversive Shakespearean *Sonnets* which tackle the tradition and praise the beauty of a man rather than a woman's.

By tapping into such fragmented descriptions of a beautiful male body, Wilde justifies the lust it might inspire in a man, as well as a woman. Therefore, the desire for the male body is indirectly universalised and little does it matter whether the agent here is a man or a woman. The universalisation of the desire of the male body is accomplished by the extensive use of vivid imagery and aesthetic depictions of the beauty of the male body, always on par with Wilde's 'Art for Art's sake' Aestheticism convictions and New Hellenism ideals:

the breast of the moon when she lies on the breast of the sea... There is nothing in the world so white as thy body ... The long black nights, when the moon hides her face, when the stars are afraid, are not so black. The silence that dwells in the forest is not so black. There is nothing in the world so black as thy hair ... Thy mouth is redder than the feet of those who tread the wine in the wine-press (*Salome* 16–17).

Finally, as far as the third aspect of the triptych is concerned, the Song associated with Apollo, the music in *Salome* manifests itself long before the Dance of the Seven Veils. Wilde inserted music in the play with the use of the French language as discussed above. What should be noted, nevertheless, is that Song here, just like Wine and Women, becomes originally identified with Iokanaan, the ideal of beauty as praised by Salome: "Thy voice is music to my ear" (*Salome* 15). A firm circle is established here between music and beauty.

Music is eventually foregrounded with the act of seduction, and the Dance of the Seven Veils is the culmination of Wine, Women, and Song. While the entire play has been spiralling to a climax of madness and loss of control since the very first moments, the Dance of the Seven Veils itself unfolds quite anticlimactically and the act is completed in a brief, matter-of-fact sentence: "Salome dances the dance of the seven veils" (*Salome* 37). The climax of *Salome* is stripped of any suspense, as, according to Tydeman and Price, the Tetrarch is won over before even the dance begins (9). That is because the intensity of *Salome* lies with desire and temptation, and not with fulfilment. After the characters of the play have been so ruthlessly tormented by their lust, little relief will it offer whether they yield to temptation, kill one another, or kill themselves. This way, the desire itself is foregrounded, in tandem with the spirit of the Victorian Era as discussed above.

Far from the triptych, the mortification of the flesh is compatible with the cold, dispassionate, sterilised world of Iokanaan where passions have no place, and the triptych serves as an attempt to revive the flame from the ashes. Acting as foils to one another the same

way Sophoclean Antigone and Ismene did, Iokanaan and Salome represent a battle between the morality of the Victorian Era and the New Hellenism, everything it stood for, and the threat it constituted to the order of things. It is, in other words, a battle between the old and the new order of things; or rather the old and the older order of things. This can be further backed by the fact that Wilde confuses Herod on purpose because he's not a historical character but type (Ross x). By stripping his character of his actual identity as a historical person, Wilde all the more reinforces the diachronic battle of the play.

The triptych of Dionysus, Aphrodite and Apollo does not act as a form of joy and pleasure in *Salome*. Instincts and passions allude to suppression and resonate guilt and the deeply-rooted sense of duty that one is burdened with to combat such innermost urges. Should one cross the line between morality and libertinism, they will end up like Salome who has Iokanaan beheaded or the various characters who torture Justine. In other words, life in a society will be unfeasible. The suppression of violent instincts and the taming of fierce passions is a human being's duty to a society that does not even acknowledge them—not at all different from the Page of Herodias who lost his friend and not only was his pain not acknowledged; not only was he offered no comfort or solace for his loss; on top of everything, he was expected to go on carrying out orders as if nothing had transpired. And yet, ironically enough, the Page of Herodias who experiences this loss against his will, and Salome who has her beloved one beheaded are not all that different. The motif of “[e]ach man kill[ing] the thing he loves” (Wilde 118) comes up again in *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* (1898), “insist[ing] on a tragic double bind of the human condition which demands compassion rather than condemnation” (Varty xii) and “establish[ing] a moral likeness between the condemned man...and the readers by the use of the startling refrain” (Varty xii). The fact that the refrain in question comes as Wilde's own reply to Bassanio's question to Shylock in the trial scene in *The Merchant of Venice* (ca. 1596–1599)—“Do all men kill the things they do not love?” (Shakespeare qtd in Varty xii), once again spans the Elizabethan canon to Wilde's own era, making a universal statement about the human condition that is forever bound to be plagued by such passions and impulses.

In this aspect, Wilde is far from materialistic or hedonistic, but exactly as he appears in the first pages of *De Profundis*. In relating incidents when Bosie disrupted him from devoting himself to his art, it can be inferred that even though Wilde gave in and ended up prioritising Bosie, it was not without the nagging feeling that he appreciated Art far more than Bosie (*De Profundis* 7–9), in the same way he appreciated morality and blamed Bosie for degradation (*De Profundis* 9).

The connection between Dionysus, Aphrodite and Apollo to art is established firmly throughout the play by allusions to the power of the gaze. The first and the second soldier remark that the Tetrarch is looking at someone (*Salome* 4); the Page of Herodias begs the Young Syrian not to look at Salome (*Salome* 9); the Tetrarch has banned anyone from looking at Iokanaan (*Salome* 7); Herodias echoes the Page's plea to the Tetrarch not to look at Salome (*Salome* 20); the Tetrarch will not look at the body of the Young Syrian (*Salome* 20); Salome begs The Young Syrian but to look at Iokanaan (*Salome* 12), and in return promises to look at him when she passes by the bridge tomorrow (*Salome* 13); Iokanaan refuses to look at Salome (*Salome* 19); and Salome bemoans the fact that the severed head of Iokanaan will not look at her (*Salome* 43–44). Like Art made to be gazed at, the characters gain meaning by becoming acknowledged as such; and this is how they also make it to posterity, frozen in time to be looked at like the paintings of *Salome Dancing before Herod*, *Tattooed Salome* and *The Apparition* by Gustave Moreau that inspired Wilde for the creation of *Salome* (Primorac). The two aforementioned elements of Dionysus and Aphrodite in unity with the third one of Apollo—the one that was not previously encountered in Sade's *Justine*—confers a whole new dimension to the human nature. Unlike Sade, who seems to find it impossible and unthinkable to tame one's desires, Wilde here approaches the matter of temptations with a civilised and artistic curiosity that redirects their vehemence and channels them in Art, perpetuating, thus, the creation of Beauty, contributing to John Keats' doctrine phrased in the last two lines of *Ode on a Grecian Urn*: "Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know."

### 3.7 In Vinculis Invictus (?)

"Can a man tell what will come to pass? No man knows it" (*Salome* 24) Herodias ponders, questioning the validity of Iokanaan's predictions. And yet, remarkably enough, the prophet Iokanaan foretold Wilde's fate three years later, the author was found behind bars after his defamation trial against Lord Douglas' father in 1895. Tim Youngs notes that Robert Ross was shocked after having met Wilde for the first time after his arrest and wrote the following to Oscar Browning on 12 November 1895: "his hands are like those of a skeleton. The colour of his face is completely changed, but this cannot be altogether attributed to his slight beard. The latter only hides the appalling sunken cheeks" (Ross qtd in Youngs 183).

It would be impossible to miss the irony of how much Wilde resembles Iokanaan's wretched state in this instance, especially after the author's statement that "[his] life is like a

work of art” (Wilde qtd in Youngs 183) after his doctrine in *The Decay of Lying*: “Life imitates art far more than art imitates life.” His very life became testament to the Art he adored.

But still, the man who was condemned with immorality and libertinism by his contemporaries does not appear to be holding any grudges to them: “The cry in *De Profundis* is no pose; it is analogous to the cry, “ ‘Father, forgive them; they know not what they do’ ” (Ellis 191). He was more preoccupied with saving Bosie from his avarice and foul temperament, than extracting revenge of any sort: “let the reading of this terrible letter – for such I know it is – prove to you as important a crisis and turning-point of your life as the writing of it is to me” (*De Profundis* 183) he pleads. In other words, Wilde was more concerned with keeping empathy kindness and compassion in his heart and living by such values, even though they seemed to be a far cry from the morality his contemporaries adhered to and, based on which, condemned him. The same dejected prisoner who wrote ‘ “I died in prison”’ (Wilde qtd in Youngs 183); the same Wilde who wrote “to his friends a few days after leaving prison as to where to buy the best boots” (Ellis 193), also sent “two letters ... to the Daily Chronicle as pleas for prison reform” (Ellis 193).

#### **4. Conclusion**

What the two writers did in *Justine* and *Salome* was portray the spirit of the Ancient Greek Gods as the manifestation of the human condition perpetuating itself throughout the centuries. And yet, in doing so, they were not necessarily nostalgic of long lost times, or visionaries of the distant future. Wilde, as well as Sade, merely captivated the quintessence of the human condition, which our own time and age is no stranger to. It is not Wine, Women and Song we and our peers are acquainted with, though; nor is it Dionysus, Aphrodite and Apollo. What might actually resonate with our generations in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century is the debauchery triptych known as *Sex, Drugs and Rock n’Roll*. The phrase originates from a song by Ian Dury with the same title (1969) and was popularised in modern culture when cited in a 1969 article by LIFE: “The counter culture has its sacraments in sex, drugs and rock.”

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### Περίληψη:

Το παράδοξο με συγγραφείς όπως ο Μαρκήσιος ντε Σαντ και ο Όσκαρ Ουάιλντ είναι πως, όσο και αν τους αποδοκίμαζαν οι σύγχρονοί τους, έχουν λάβει μεγάλη προσοχή από τους ακαδημαϊκούς. Αυτό οφείλεται στην πολυσχιδή φύση των έργων τους, τα οποία αγγίζουν αμφιλεγόμενα θέματα: ηθική και έλλειψη ηθικών φραγμών είναι οι δύο εκ διαμέτρου αντίθετοι πόλοι που αποτελούν τον άξονα έργων όπως η *Ζυστίν* και η *Σαλώμη*, αν και προερχόμενα από διαφορετικές εποχές. Η διαφθορά και η σκανδαλώδης φύση για την οποία κατηγορήθηκαν οι συγγραφείς τους από τους συγχρόνους τους, ωστόσο, θα μπορούσε να αποτελεί την έκφραση του ελληνικού στοιχείου, καθώς και μια προσπάθεια να επιστρέψουμε στον αρχαίο ελληνικό τρόπο ζωής. Με άλλα λόγια, αυτό που ο ντε Σαντ και ο Ουάιλντ απαθανάτισαν στα έργα τους είναι η ανθρώπινη υπόσταση παγιδευμένη σε εκάστοτε κοινωνικές συμβάσεις, καθώς και μια προσπάθεια να σπάσουν τα δεσμά αυτά. Τα εν λόγω έργα αναλύονται από την προοπτική του τριπτύχου «Διόνυσος, Αφροδίτη, Απόλλωνας»: ένας παραλληλισμός που παρατήρησε ο Άλιστερ Κράουλι μεταξύ των Ολύμπιων θεών και του τριπτύχου «Οίνος, Γυνή και Μέλος.»