

The Gaze and the Circumvention of Power in
Richard Strauss' *Salome*

Yoojeong Cho

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“To see is to control; to have one’s vision represented is to have one’s perception of the world ratified. To be seen is to be subject to control; to represent women solely as objects of other’s vision denies women their subjectivity.”¹

The notion of “the gaze” and its implied power are central to the plot of Richard Strauss’ opera *Salome*. As stated by scholar Helen Tookey, “The fate of a character is determined by her or his status in this relation, whether looking or being looked at.”² The entire opera itself is a narrative and a musical discourse of the gaze with uneven power between the gazer and the gazed, the subject and the object, and the constant portrayal of Salome as an erotic center for the male gaze. Under the patriarchal premise of the male gaze, the men emerge as the gazers, while the women are denied their subjecthood and are fantasized as the objects of the gaze.

The stereotypical image of *femme fatale* and *femme fragile* share the same premise with the male gaze, both embodying the masculine fantasy of female identity and power. The idea of *femme fatale* as a seductress whose sexual charm often leads men to their demise connotes that feminine sexuality and supremacy are “evil.” On the other side, *femme fragile* objectifies the women’s power, depicting them as vulnerable, powerless, and submissive. Along with the male gaze, these demonizations and idealizations of women are masculine-constructed concepts that relegate women as the voyeuristic objects of the male fantasy.

However, in Richard Strauss’ *Salome*, the heroine voluntarily and deliberately offers herself as the object of the male gaze and assumes the position of the submissive objectification. Strauss’ music shows how Salome, in her interactions with the male characters, clothes herself with the archetypal, patriarchal defamations of feminine sexuality, strategically oscillating between *femme fatale* and *femme fragile* in order to exercise her power over the men and get what she wants. However, while satisfying those archaic masculine fantasies, Salome does not simply remain a blank screen where the men can project their fantasies. Salome resists, using the very idea that objectifies and entraps her: the gaze. Historically, paintings generally depict

¹ Brenner, Athalya. *A Feminist Companion to Esther, Judith and Susanna*. Feminist Companion to the Bible ; 7. Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995, 290.

² Tookey, Helen. “‘The Fiend That Smites With a Look’: The Monstrous/Monstrous Woman and the Danger of the Gaze in Oscar Wilde’s ‘Salome’”. *Literature and Theology* 18 (1). Oxford University Press, 2004, 29. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23925692>.

Salome as someone who gazes back. One example is the painting of Salome by Jules-Joseph Lefebvre (c. 1890) (Figure 1).³ Salome's course of action may make her an inert object of the gaze, but by returning the gaze, she actively defies and resists those traditional power dynamics, ultimately asserting power over the men. Salome uses the archaic concept of masculine dominance and fantasy, the idea that made generations of women before her voyeuristic objects, and "wields it as both shield and sword."⁴

Figure 1. Painting *Salome* (c. 1890) by Jules Lefebvre. Salome gazes back.



In my paper, I will analyze the text and music of three crucial scenes from the opera to support my argument above. This includes how Salome, the princess, manipulates and averts the traditional, masculine objectifications of feminine power as she interacts with the three male characters of the opera: Narraboth, the captain of the guards, Jokanaan, the prophet, and Herod, the king. The first male character that meets his demise because of Salome is Narraboth. In this

³ Throughout different eras, Salome has been depicted as the gazer. Some of the examples are Cesare Da Sesto (1477-1523)'s *Salome*, Henri-Alexandre-George Regnault's *Salome* (1870) and Robert Henri's *Salome* (1909).

⁴ Bentley, Toni. *Sisters of Salome*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002, 34.

scene, Salome pleads and lures Narraboth into bringing the prophet, Jokanaan, before her, which is against the king's orders. She does this by portraying herself as a powerless *femme fragile*. Salome uses a tool that is stereotypically gendered female: a plea. While she is capable of commanding the captain of the guard, who is of lower social status, Salome deliberately decides against using it, for she is confident that her embodiment of a powerless *femme fragile* will satisfy Narraboth's archaic fantasy, win him over and allow her to achieve dominance over him much more effectively and quickly. In addition to this voluntary submission, Salome hands Narraboth what he considers the ultimate prize: a look and a smile. She says, "And tomorrow morning, when I glance at you through my veil...I might even give you a smile...Look at me, Narraboth, look at me."⁵ Salome has seemingly given up her power by offering him the role of the gazer. However, it is through this circumvention of power that Salome gains greater power over Narraboth and achieves her heart's desire: to see Jokanaan, the prophet. Her interaction with Narraboth displays that she is not objectified nor empowered by the gaze of men. More so, Salome gazes at Narraboth during this entire interaction, further implying the idea that her voluntary submission is strategic.

Strauss' music during this scene supports the actions and intentions of Salome. Her intoxicating charms and intentional recourse into the masculine perception of female fragility and dependence are well articulated by various musical figures and specific orchestration. Overall, there is an excessive use of feminine-identified instruments: the flute and the harp. The accompaniment, interwoven by instruments with lighter timbre, such as flute, harp, oboe, and clarinet, together with the violins, create a seductive undertow of music (See figure 2). The music itself becomes another layer with which Salome clothes herself as she transforms herself into a *femme fragile*, intentionally renouncing her power. Especially the series of falling, sighing figures on the name "Narraboth" not only perfectly embodies a plea, but also resembles an act of a bow, which evokes the submissive characteristic of a *femme fragile* (See figure 2). Her music completes her course of action and deliberate choice to renounce her power and submit to the archaic stereotypes of women and male dominance.

⁵ "Und morgen früh werde ich unter den Muss'linschleiern dir einen Blick zuwerfen, Narraboth, ich werde dich ansehen, kann sein, ich werde dir zülacheln." Scene 2.

Figure 2. Salome's lush accompaniment and the sighing figure on the name "Narraboth"⁶

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1. Flöte.

1. Hoboe.

1. A-Clar.

Basscl.(B.)

Celesta.

1. Harfe.

Salome.

(tritt an Narraboth heran) (leise und lebhaft sprechend)

Du _____ wirst das für mich tun, Nar - - - - ra-both, nicht wahr? Ich war dir

*Descending theme on the name "Naraboth"

49

(Zweiter Spieler vom 1. Viol.)

Viol. I.

2. Viol.

Viol. II.

2. Viol.

9124

Furthermore, Salome's accompaniment draws a stark contrast with Narraboth's. As opposed to Narraboth's instrumentally denser, chordal accompaniment, Salome's accompaniment is dominated by arpeggios in the violins that constantly create a perpetual stream of sound and a dreamy texture (See figure 2 for Salome's accompaniment and figure 3 for Narraboth's accompaniment). In accordance with the dreamy accompaniment, Salome's vocal line resides mainly in the singer's mid-voice range that highlights the sweetness of the female voice at its most comfortably beautiful tessitura. However, the mere "sweetness" is never the

⁶ Richard Strauss, *Salome*, Op. 54 (England: Boosey&Hawkes, Ltd.), 34.

extent of her vocal prowess. In the previous opening sequences where Salome simply demands the soldiers to bring Jokanaan before her, she showed a glimpse of her vocal stamina and ability through extensive tessitura and leaps that require a significant level of virtuosity. Just like her physical course of action in this scene, her music deliberately does not reveal her vocal power and instead resorts to feminine sweetness and fragility.

Figure 3. Narraboth's chordal, straightforward accompaniment that draws a stark contrast with Salome's lush music.⁷

The image shows a musical score for Narraboth's accompaniment. It consists of three staves: a vocal line (treble clef) and two piano accompaniment staves (treble and bass clefs). The tempo is marked 'sempre molto presto' and 'stets äusserst schnell.' The lyrics are in German and English: 'Der Tet-rarch hat es aus-drück-lich ver-bo-ten, dass But the Tetrarch has for-mal-ly for-bid-den that'. The score includes a treble clef, a key signature of one flat, and a dynamic marking of 'f'. The number '52' is written above the vocal line.

The second male character that Salome encounters is Jokanaan, the prophet who is at the center of her desire as well as hatred. This particular scene where Salome interacts with Jokanaan for the first time displays Salome's transgressive sexuality and desire, portraying her as an active gazer. Salome not only gazes at Jokanaan the entire time he is on stage, but she also aggressively projects her own fantasies of him by describing his physical attributes: his white body, black hair, and red lips. Salome absolutely empowers and dominates Jokanaan, demoting him to an object to be showcased and desired. Throughout the scene, the music also embodies this premise behind the gaze that empowers the gazer; it is Salome's changing thoughts and moods that constantly dictate and manipulate the musical progression of this scene. The music is transformed according to her love or disgust for Jokanaan by being lyrical or highly chromatic at times. When Salome praises the beauty of Jokanaan's body, the orchestra underneath her vocal line weaves a lush undertow of diatonic melody with the direction "dolce cantabile" or "sung sweetly." (See figure 4) However, when she faces Jokanaan's rejection, the music articulates the

⁷ Richard Strauss, *Salome* (New York, N.Y.: Edwin F. Kalmus Publisher of Music), 29.

change in Salome's sentiment with intense chromaticism (See figure 5). As Jokanaan's white body becomes a blank screen that projects Salome's fantasies, the music supports Salome's point of view and not that of Jokanaan. Such changing perception of Salome between desire and disgust is reinforced repeatedly in the music throughout the scene.

Figure 4. Salome expresses her love and desire for Jokanaan's body.⁸

The image shows a musical score for Salome's aria. The top staff is the vocal line, starting at measure 92. The lyrics are: "an! Ich bin ver-liebt in deinen Leib, Jo - an! I am am' - - rous of thy bo - dy! Jo -". The piano accompaniment is marked "(dolce cantabile)" and "p". The bass line is marked "pp". There is a * symbol under the piano part in measure 92.

Figure 5. After Jokanaan's rejection.⁹

The image shows a musical score for Salome's aria. The top staff is the vocal line, starting with "Salomé." and "Dein Leib ist grau - - en - voll. Er ist wie der Leib ei - nes". The lyrics continue: "Thy bo - dy is hi - - dious. It's just like the bo - dy of a". The piano accompaniment is marked "dim. - -". There is a "f" marking in the piano part in measure 84.

During this interaction with Jokanaan, Salome's appropriation of the gaze violates the conventional boundaries between the gazer and the gazed, subject and object, and male and female. Such attempt to assume the dominant position and to openly resist the established cultural order inevitably ends in failure, because the male order must be restored. During this

⁸ Richard Strauss, *Salome* (New York, N.Y.: Edwin F. Kalmus Publisher of Music), 50.

⁹ Richard Strauss, *Salome* (New York, N.Y.: Edwin F. Kalmus Publisher of Music), 53.

ongoing series of requests and refusals between Salome and Jokanaan, the plot portrays Salome's transgression, and furthermore a vocal expression of female sexuality and dominance as something to be rejected and reprimanded. The scene brings light to the sexist, patriarchal society in which Salome ultimately finds herself as a victim, a society that denies women a position of power and expression. A woman cannot get what she wants by simply demanding it. Her power must be gained and exercised by resorting back to the stereotypical, patriarchal idealizations of women. This particular scene with Jokanaan that openly portrays Salome's power provides an effectively stark contrast with her interactions with other male characters, Narraboth and Herod. During her interaction with Jokanaan, where Salome exclusively assumes the role of the gazer, she seems to be empowered and dominant, yet ultimately she fails to achieve what she wants, which is to demand Jokanaan's complete attention and to ultimately make him succumb to her power. However, in her previous scene with Narraboth as well as her following scene with Herod, she transforms into a *femme fragile* and a *femme fatale* (respectively), successfully exercising her power over them using the two patriarchal depictions of female sex.

The pivotal scene with the infamous Dance of the Seven Veils is where Salome once again resorts to one of the archetypal images of women, a sensual *femme fatale*. Strategically resorting to this masculine demonization of the female sex, Salome preys on Herod's lust to get what she wants: the head of Jokanaan. While showcasing Salome as a prized sexual object of Herod, the dance itself becomes an act of liberation, resistance, and self-expression. Susan McClary's book "Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality" traces the characterization of powerful and insubordinate women in operas and the masculine treatment of these characters as "madwomen". In her argument of Salome, McClary states that "In opera, the madwoman is given the music of greatest stylistic privilege, the music that seems to do what is most quintessentially *musical*, as opposed to verbal or conventional."¹⁰ The depths of her subconscious, her bewitching duality, and transgressive female sensuality are well exposed through this wordless dance that is both menacing and liberating.

¹⁰ McClary, Susan. *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002, 102.

The idea of dance being an expression of Salome's transgressive sexuality, her duality in character (*femme fatale* vs. *femme fragile*), and her sense of resistance and empowerment is physically symbolized by the ritual shedding of the veils as the dance progresses, and it is supported by musical transgressions such as excessive chromaticism. Strauss' use of non-conventional harmonies and chromaticism for this scene, such as cluster tones and "diabolic" tritones, is a musical portrait of Salome, for "Salome's pathology is signaled by her slippery chromatic deviations from normative diatonicism."¹¹ Strauss immediately presents those ideas from the opening melodies and continues to use those materials throughout the scene. The slimy chromaticism and grace notes of the opening melody are extremely exotic, and are accompanied by harmonies that do not have a tonal center nor inter-relationships (See figure 6). In other words, the music defies any sort of traditional musical conventions. If Salome's resistance has been symbolically portrayed through her reciprocal gaze up to this point, the unconventional music of this wordless scene further elaborates upon that resistance, musically voicing Salome's defiance against the established patriarchal cultural order and the masculine objectification of the female sex.

Figure 6. Opening melody of the Dance of the Seven Veils¹²

(Salomé dances the dance of the seven veils.)
(Salome tanzt den Tanz der sieben Schleier.)
Ziemlich langsam. *Abbastanza moderato*

Chromatic, half-step grace notes

The image shows a musical score for the opening of the Dance of the Seven Veils. It consists of two systems of piano accompaniment. The first system is in 3/4 time and starts with a piano (p) dynamic. The melodic line features chromatic half-step grace notes, with one such note circled in red. The second system includes dynamics such as piano (p), crescendo (cresc.), and diminuendo (dim.).

¹¹ McClary, Susan. *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002, 100.

¹² Richard Strauss, *Salome* (New York, N.Y.: Edwin F. Kalmus Publisher of Music), 138.

First of all, the harmonic composition of the opening sequence is anything but conventional. The first two beats of this melody lay out a straightforward A minor tonality with the bass A and E outlining the A chord and the determinate minor third (A and C) filled in through the three-note figure of the motive. It is the third beat of the melody that presents a harmonic enigma that deviates from the traditional tonal order. Composed of Eb, F, G, and B, the pitch collection of the third beat does not conform to any sort of traditional tonality. Rather, it is a tone cluster that does not bear any tonal center or harmonic significance (See figure 7). However, Strauss deliberately placed an untraditional tone cluster next to a traditional A minor tonality, directly juxtaposing them and musically embodying Salome's defiance against the established male order.

Figure 7. An A minor chord and a tone cluster in the opening melody of the Dance of the Seven Veils¹³

(Salomé dances the dance of the seven veils.)
(Salomé tanzt den Tanz der sieben Schleier.)

Ziemlich langsam. *Abbastanza moderato*

A minor a tone cluster

An overlay of those two harmonic entities in a single melodic line not only creates a harmonically dubious, exotic sound, but also highlights the tritonic diminished fifth leap from A to Eb (See figure 8). Tritone consists of three whole tones, which results in the interval of augmented fourth or diminished fifth. Regarded as a dissonance since the Middle Ages, tritone has been tabooed as *diabolus in musica* (the devil in music) and was the object of prohibition by theorists.¹⁴ Strauss not only employs a musical idea that transgresses the conventions of the

¹³ Richard Strauss, *Salome* (New York, N.Y.: Edwin F. Kalmus Publisher of Music), 138.

¹⁴ Randel, Don Michael. *The Harvard Dictionary of Music*. 4th ed. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003, 911.

traditional Western counterpoint, but highlights it by presenting it on a strong downbeat of the melody. Thus, Salome’s maddening dance and her symbolic resistance against the oppressive male order of Herod’s court is portrayed by an intervallic configuration that is encoded as “devil”, an ultimate form of musical transgression.

Figure 8. A tritone (diminished 5th) between A to Eb.



Furthermore, the most prominent instrument of her dance music is oboe and are not any of the stereotypical female gendered instruments, such as flute or harp. The slimy, extremely chromatic grace notes that strongly characterize Salome’s dance music are given to oboe throughout the entire dance. The oboe melodic line also features a descending augmented fourth leap from D to G#, taking over the foreboding tritone theme that was presented in the opening melody and further elaborating upon its “diabolic” connotation (See figure 9). Nineteenth-century writers portrayed oboes as temperamental, for the instrument is capable of producing a timbre of voluptuous beauty, but if unrestrained, it is likely to crack. Thus, the technical composition of the instrument resembled the defamed nineteenth-century image of “madwoman” who is on the verge of hysteria. Since then, the oboe has been used as a substitute for the female voice, since its range and tone color is most similar to the soprano voice.¹⁵ Instead of having Salome sing, Strauss’ chose an instrument that is associated to female voice and gave that instrument extreme chromaticism, modality and tritone configurations, all of which are prone to connotations of instability, hysteria and “evilness”.

¹⁵ Burgess, Geoffrey, and Haynes, Bruce. *The Oboe*. Yale Musical Instrument Series. New Haven, Conn. ; London: Yale University Press, 2004, 233-234.

Figure 9. Opening melody of the dance where the oboe takes over the chromatic grace notes (red) and the tritone theme (blue).¹⁶

The image displays a page of a musical score for Richard Strauss's *Salome*, Op. 54. The score is arranged in a standard orchestral format with multiple staves. The instruments listed on the left include 1. gr. Fl., 1. Hoboe., 2. A-Clar., 2. B-Clar., 1. & 3. Fag., 3. Fag., Contrafag., kl. Pauke., Tamburin., kl. Trommel., Viol. I., Viol. II., Br. (alte) (ohne Solo), Celli., and C. B. The score is marked with a common time signature (C) and includes various dynamic markings such as *ppp*, *pp*, *p*, *cresc.*, and *dim.*. The oboe part (1. Hoboe.) is highlighted with a red oval, and specific chromatic grace notes and a tritone theme are circled in blue. The score also features performance instructions like *gliss.*, *pizz.*, *arco*, and *Solo*.

During her dance, much like her interaction with Narraboth, Salome offers herself—her body, to be specific—as an object of sensual spectacle that gratifies Herod’s voyeuristic sexual desire. However, while seemingly relinquishing her power to the gazer’s fantasy, she nonetheless gazes back and demands what she wants. Her dialogue with Herod immediately following the dance depicts Salome at the peak of her power. Salome simply gazes at Herod and makes the same demand repeatedly: “I ask of you the head of Jokanaan”. She does not plea as she did with

¹⁶ Richard Strauss, *Salome*, Op. 54 (England: Boosey&Hawkes, Ltd.), 204.

Narraboth. The centrality of power has shifted; now it is Herod who begs. The mask she puts on as a seductive *femme fatale* may have deprived her of subjecthood and demonized her power as “evil”, but she ultimately manages to get what she wants, Jokanaan’s head.

Salome’s dominance over Herod is also depicted in the music. While the music during her interaction with Narraboth embodies her appeal as a *femme fragile*, the music in this scene depicts her command and dominance. Herod’s accompaniment is full of stacked chords and unexpected chromatic progressions. It is rhythmically and tonally unstable because the melody and rhythms change fanatically. The lack of centrality in Herod’s music indicates his indecisiveness and loss of dominance over Salome and his subjection to Salome’s demand and power (See figures 10).

Salome’s music, in turn, embodies her dominance and resolution, being mostly unchangingly monotonal¹⁷ and insistent. Every time she returns, she is even more resolute in demanding the head of Jokanaan. Her music is simple with little accompaniment so that her demand is heard loud and clear and her intent is unclouded by other music. The simplicity and stability of the music make her statement declamatory and powerful (See figures 10 and 11).

Figure 10. Salome’s declamatory demand for the head of Jokanaan, juxtaposed by rhythmically and harmonically unstable music of Herod.¹⁸

The musical score for Figure 10 consists of three staves. The top staff is Salome's vocal line, marked *Lento* and *langsam* (slow). The middle staff is Herod's accompaniment, marked *stark* (powerfully). The bottom staff is the piano accompaniment. The score is in 4/4 time and features complex chromatic progressions in the piano part. The lyrics are in German and English.

Salome. (stark) (powerfully) 261
 Ich ver-lan-ge von dir den Kopf des Jo-chan-na-an.
 I ask of you the head of Jo ka-na-an.

Herod.
 lang-ten.
 ask-ed.
 langsam des vorigen Zeitmasses.
 Nein, nein, ich will ihn dir nicht
 No, no, I do not wish to

¹⁷ Except on the name Jokanaan where the music goes up to emphasize his name.

¹⁸ Richard Strauss, *Salome* (New York, N.Y.: Edwin F. Kalmus Publisher of Music), 156.

Figure 11. Salome's continuing demand for the head of Jokanaan.¹⁹

langsam $\text{♩} = \text{♩. des vorigen Zeitmasses}$ 271 *accelerando*

Salomé.

Ich for-dre den Kopf des Jo - cha - na - an.
I ask for the head of Jo - ka - na - an.

ter. Du hörst nicht zu, du hörst nicht
les. Thou art not listening, thou art not

ragd. *espress.*
rald. langsam $\text{♩} = \text{♩. des vorigen Zeitmasses}$

p *sfz*

While this interaction with Herod openly exhibits Salome's power, it also concludes with the punishment of female resistance and supremacy. As already foreboded through Salome's interaction with Jokanaan, the plot depicts an open resistance against the patriarchal order as something to be rejected and reprimanded. Through the circumvention of power, Salome managed to achieve what she wanted; the head of Jokanaan. However, this fatal transgression against the male order is punished by death, as Herod declares Salome "monstrous", and she is crushed under the shields of Herod's soldiers. McClary explains that within the death of the Romantic heroines in opera that are "sexually frenzied madwomen", there lies a subtext; their symbolic sacrifice uphold men's rational social order.²⁰ Death is the price of the female transgressions - transgressions of familial rules, political rules, the things at stake in sexual and authoritarian power.²¹

In case of Salome, her death signifies the restoration of both social and tonal order. By the end of her monologue with the head of Jokanaan where she finally kisses him, the music displays the climax of her supremacy and transgression with the tonality of C#, a key signature with all the accidentals (See figure 12). However, Herod's music punishes Salome's social transgression with a key that has no accidentals, completely averting the C# tonality of Salome's

¹⁹ Richard Strauss, *Salome* (New York, N.Y.: Edwin F. Kalmus Publisher of Music), 161.

²⁰ McClary, Susan. *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002, 50.

²¹ Clément, Catherine, Wing, Betsy, and McClary, Susan. *Opera, Or, The Undoing of Women*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988, 10.

music and restoring the male order of his court. Salome then meets her demise under the music and the shields of the patriarchal oppression (See figure 13 and 14).

Figure 12. Salome's final key, C# major.²²

Sal. Ich ha-be deinen Mund ge-
I have now kissed thy
küssst, Jo-cha - na - an. Ich ha-be ihn ge-küssst
mouth, Jo-ka - na - an. I have now kissed

Figure 13. With the naturalization of all the accidentals of Salome's C# tonality, Herod's accidental-free tonality symbolizes the restoration of the male order.²³

Sal. dei - nen Mund.
thy mouth.
Herod (turning round) Herodes (sich umwendend) frei
on Salome, covering her with light.) wieder hervor und beleuchtet Salome.) Man tö - te die-ses
Go, kill at once that

²² Richard Strauss, *Salome* (New York, N.Y.: Edwin F. Kalmus Publisher of Music), 202.

²³ Richard Strauss, *Salome* (New York, N.Y.: Edwin F. Kalmus Publisher of Music), 203.

Figure 14. Herod's tonality triumphs and the patriarchal order is restored with the death of Salome.²⁴

Molto allegro
Sehr schnell. (Die Soldaten stürzen sich auf Salome und begraben sie unter ihren Schilden.) 362

Herod. Weib! wench! (The soldiers rush forward and crush Salomé under their shields.)
M. ♩ = 80.

(Curtain.)
(Der Vorhang fällt schnell.)

Although Salome eventually falls as a victim to the male order, she nevertheless usurps the authorial voice in her interactions with the male characters. As musically represented and encoded throughout the opera, Salome is dangerous and transgressive because she is not confined nor objectified. Salome, while using the images of *femme fragile* and *femme fatale* as her shield and weapon, voluntarily relegates herself to the masculine view of women's traditional role of submissive objectification. However, she refuses to be objectified through the patriarchal lens; she deliberately allows herself to be gazed, yet she equally gazes back, resists and dominates. At the end, she chooses death over submission to the oppressive system. In the world of female defamations, idealizations, and demonization that is supposed to confine her and deprive her of subjecthood, Salome completely upsets the gendered power dynamics and the archaic, patriarchal definitions of female power.

²⁴ Richard Strauss, *Salome* (New York, N.Y.: Edwin F. Kalmus Publisher of Music), 203.

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